

ON THE ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION AND DATING OF THE CHURCH OF DAYR ANBĀ BĪŠŪY ("RED MONASTERY") NEAR SŪHĀĞ IN UPPER EGYPT

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Introduction

As is well known, the church of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy¹ near Sūhāğ (Fig. 1), often misleadingly referred to as the "Red

I am very grateful to Elizabeth S. Bolman, the director of the Red Monastery Project, and the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) for the invitation to investigate the architectural decoration in the church. I was able to work in Dayr Anbā Bīšūy from 29 February to 8 March 2004 and from 11 to 24 March 2007, and during these weeks to make a number of observations which had escaped me on earlier, shorter visits. I have good memories of the pleasant atmosphere which Elizabeth Bolman managed to create.

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I had the opportunity of discussing with Peter Grossmann the section of the present material which deals with the construction history, and with his well-known generosity he made plans and literature available to me, for which I express my cordial thanks. I would like to thank Kirsten Krumeich for providing photographs, and I am very grateful to her and to Dale Kinney for help in English terminology. Dale Kinney was so kind as to transmit some of the measurements she was able to take from a newly erected scaffold in December 2006. I thank Cédric Meurice for the access to unpublished photos taken by Jean Clédat. My photographs were taken in 2004 and 2007, except for a few that date to earlier visits to the monuments.

1 U. Monneret de Villard, *Les couvents près de Sohāg (Deyr el-Abiad et Deyr el-Ahmar)*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1925–26), passim; P. Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten* (Leiden–Boston–Cologne, 2001), 536–39, fig. 155, pl. 9a (with older literature).

Monastery," is a small-scale copy, executed in more modest materials, of the monastic church located just a few kilometers away, which was built by the famous abbot Shenute around the middle of the fifth century (Dayr Anbā Šinūda, the so-called White Monastery).² The original opulent decoration of the church of Shenute's monastery is now, however, in ruinous condition, owing to a disaster in the early Middle Ages (probably in the seventh century), the results of which included serious damage to parts of the sanctuary; moreover, on account of subsequent repairs, later destructions, and ill-informed restorations,³ the former splendor and variety can now be envisioned only with difficulty, if at all. The architectural decoration of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, by contrast, has been uniquely preserved, at least in the sanctuary and on the sanctuary's façade (Figs. 3, 5, 6):⁴ nowhere else in Egypt is there a monument of the late antique/early Byzantine period whose architectural sculpture remains in situ up to the highest level of the building⁵ and can reliably be examined and assessed. Only scarce traces of paint bear

2 Monneret de Villard, *Couvents*, passim; Grossmann, *Architektur*, 528–36, figs. 150–53, pls. 8, 10, 12a (with older literature). P. Grossmann, "Zur Stiftung und Bauzeit der großen Kirche des Shenuteklosters bei Sūhāğ (Oberägypten)," *BZ* 101 (2008): 35–54 argues for completion of the main construction work in 449.

3 Cf. Grossmann, *Architektur*, 533–34; H.-G. Severin, "Zur Skulptur und Malerei der spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Zeit in Ägypten," in *Ägypten in spätantik-christlicher Zeit: Einführung in die koptische Kultur*, ed. M. Krause (Wiesbaden, 1998), 311–14.

4 Severin, "Skulptur," 314–15.

5 For example, the capitals of the window frames in the crossing above the sanctuary, more than 10 m above ground level.

The architectural decoration carved in wood is entirely lost. A wooden moulding with ornamental decoration in the south section of the sanctuary façade beneath the lower order niche is documented in a watercolor by J. Clédat dating from 1903/5 (Monneret de Villard, *Couvents*, fig. 212).

evidence of the original colors;⁶ the extraordinarily well-conserved polychromy on the plane and curved surfaces and on the sculptured elements in the sanctuary dates from a later period.

A written source suggests that Shenute engaged and paid professional craftsmen of various trades for the construction and decoration of his large and splendid church (Dayr Anbā Šinūda).⁷ This building is, in other words, not monastic art in the sense of having been created by monks. Shenute evidently did not think his monks capable of such work. For Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, by contrast, we have no such textual sources; but an analysis of the architectural decoration can, in my opinion, show that here too the design and execution of the architectural decoration were in professional hands.

It is not my intention to present here a complete and detailed description of the architectural decoration of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy;⁸ rather, I should like to give for the first time an overview of what survives,⁹ to present

6 See E. S. Bolman, "Late Antique Aesthetics, Chromophobia, and the Red Monastery, Sohag, Egypt," *Eastern Christian Art* 3 (2006): 1–24. I am greatly indebted to Luigi de Cesaris for his valuable information on the relative chronology of the painting layers.

7 See É. Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne aux IV^e et V^e siècles*, Mém. Miss. Caire 4, 2 vols. (Paris, 1888 and 1895), 1:20–21; 2:637; inaccurately quoted, as P. Grossmann pointed out to me, in E. Wipszycka, "Les aspects économiques de la vie de la communauté des Kellia," in *Le site monastique copte des Kellia: Sources historiques et explorations archéologiques; Actes du Colloque de Genève 13 au 15 août 1984*, ed. P. Bridel, Mission suisse d'archéologie copte de l'Université de Genève (Geneva, 1986), 125; reprinted in: E. Wipszycka, *Études sur le christianisme dans l'Égypte de l'antiquité tardive* (Rome, 1996), 346.

8 This would presuppose a survey with photographs of the entire architectural decoration of the monument, which I was unable to do for lack of technical equipment. In addition, an exact documentation of the sanctuary façade is urgently needed, since all the plans published hitherto (S. Clarke, *Christian Antiquities in the Nile Valley* [Oxford, 1912], pl. 50; Monneret de Villard, *Couvents*, figs. 114 and 116; H.-G. Evers and R. Romero, "Rotes und Weisses Kloster bei Sohag: Probleme der Rekonstruktion," in *Christentum am Nil: Internationale Arbeitsstagung zur Ausstellung "Koptische Kunst" Essen, Villa Hügel, 23.–25. Juli 1963*, ed. K. Wessel [Recklinghausen, 1964], 180, fig. 1) misrepresent essential details.

9 In order to facilitate the description of the architectural decoration of the building, I use the following terms, some of them translated from those used already by P. Grossmann:

sanctuary façade = east inner wall of the naos in its full breadth.

east colonnade = the four columns at the east end of the naos, running parallel to the sanctuary façade. The two outer columns are also part of the north and south colonnades respectively. The two central columns of the east colonnade have taller shafts than the lateral columns.

triumphal arch = the arch in the central opening of the sanctuary façade.

hitherto unknown material, and to summarize my latest observations, made in the spring of 2004 and the spring of 2007. My investigation is structured as follows.

Part A: An annotated catalogue presents for the first time the sculptured construction elements. Section A.1 discusses reused older sculptured elements, especially column shafts. Their origin is not known, nor is their age precisely specified, but it is very likely that they had been carved for buildings of the Roman period. Some of the column shafts in the triconch are rehewn, i.e., shortened for their reuse in the triconch. Under the section heading A.2 are discussed the architectural elements that have been sculpted for the construction of the church, above all column capitals, pilaster capitals, niches, and pediments. These are classified in groups, types, and variants. The annotation gives observations on the conception and accentuation of the architectural sculpture. In my opinion, not every sculptured element found in situ is in its initial location; this might be due to old restorations prior to the work of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe in 1906/7. Section A.3 examines a special case of reuse: in the two doors in the outer brick wall, the north and the south doors, are inserted late-antique building materials, doubtless reused as shown by their unskillful and disjointed assembly. Hence arise the following questions: were these outer walls—with insertion of late-antique building material—built at a later period to replace the original but dilapidated outer walls? Or did the outer walls belong originally to the church, and the two doors were inserted at a later date? Is it possible to date the late-antique building elements, and might they have come from demolished parts of the original church?

Part B contains an interpretative summary of the architectural decoration. Section B.1 treats the typological position of the capitals in their late-antique–Egyptian context and in particular the foliage designs of the acanthus leaf (B.1.1–B.1.3); Section B.2 considers the typological position of the niche decoration.

In Part C the organization of the construction work is discussed. Peter Grossmann has argued recently that the triconch and the naos of the church were constructed separately, i.e., that the triconch was once free-standing.¹⁰

east passages = the two passages leading east from the side conches to the side rooms of the triconch.

west passages = the two passages from the side conches leading west into the naos.

10 Grossmann, *Architektur* (n. 1 above), 538.

In my opinion, there was only one construction phase: different sections of the building (on the one hand the triconch and the sanctuary's façade, on the other hand the outer walls) were allotted to different groups of workmen, but they worked contemporaneously.

Part D examines the arguments for the date of the church. Hitherto the building has been dated to the late fifth century on the basis of a typological assessment of the architecture and a few published column capitals.¹¹ In my view, however, judging from the uncommon forms of some of the pilaster capitals, which have escaped attention up to the present, we should move the date of the building and its architectural decoration forward into a more recent period, i.e., the middle third of the sixth century; we can show at the same time that the other capitals are mostly of a retrospective character.

A. The Architectural Decoration

A.1. Reused Older Carved Blocks

We shall never be able to determine exactly the extent to which existing sculptured construction elements were reused in the construction of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy. Decorative pieces integrated into the ashlar stonework can, after all, normally be seen only from the front, while in the case of the pilaster capitals of the passages and doors in the triconch and on the façade of the sanctuary there is additionally another side abutting at right angles. As these decorative pieces are not visible all around, there is no way of excluding the possibility that they are in some way or another reworked pieces—in other words,

¹¹ Cf., for example, *ibid.*, 539 (second half, or more precisely penultimate decade, of the 5th century); K. Krumeich, *Spätantike Bauskulptur aus Oxyrhynchos: Lokale Produktion—äussere Einflüsse*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 2003), 1:20–21 (second half of the 5th century); P. Pensabene, *Elementi architettonici di Alessandria e di altri siti egiziani* (Rome, 1993), 53 (penultimate decade of the 5th century); *ibid.*, 441–42, nos. 572–73 (last third of the 5th century); H.-G. Severin, "Zum Dekor der Nischenbekrönungen aus spätantiken Grabbauten Ägyptens," *Riggisberger Berichte* 1 (1993): 76 (last third of the 5th century); Severin, "Skulptur," 315 (last quarter of the 5th century); L. Török, "A heap of stones: Aspects of the Architectural Sculpture from Heracleopolis Magna/Ahnas," *BSAC* 42 (2003): 95 (second half of the 5th century). U. Monneret de Villard himself favored a dating in the 5th century ("La basilica cristiana in Egitto," in *Atti del IV Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia Cristiana, Roma 1938*, 2 vols. [Rome, 1940], 1:299).

carved blocks deriving from other architectural contexts, rehewn and decorated for this church.¹²

If, by contrast, we restrict the search to sculptured elements whose reuse is obvious, the number is relatively small.

Triconch: The fourteen column shafts of the attached lower order have been visibly recut and reused.¹³ In the eastern conch, the first and the fourth column shafts are of marble;¹⁴ the second and third column shafts are of granite, as are the ten shafts in the north and south conches (Fig. 6).¹⁵

Sanctuary façade: The two column shafts embedded in the triumphal arch together with their coarsely hewn bases are reused granite columns, obviously in their original height (Fig. 5).

Naos: All the upright columns, i.e., the four granite column shafts of the east colonnade,¹⁶ including the two taller central column shafts, have been reused, as has the shaft of the second column of the north colonnade¹⁷ made of green stone (Fig. 50). It is likely that all the other column shafts of the naos colonnades were reused older pieces.¹⁸

¹² Revealing in this connection is the large ashlar block which is now used as a lintel for the south door in the outer wall. It has traces on its underside of remains of an ancient Egyptian relief. This stone was reused in late antiquity and cut to size as part of a frieze, decorated on one side and shifted so that its ancient decoration was no longer visible, since it now lay on the underside of the block. It is only as a result of the subsequent reuse of the frieze block as the lintel of the door that the ancient Egyptian relief is now visible once more.

¹³ Each of the side conches has five columns and four bays. In the east conch there are four columns and three bays: the greater breadth of these bays emphasizes the priority of the east conch; in addition, there was presumably a desire to avoid a column on the central axis of the east conch, and a central niche was preferred instead.

¹⁴ Nos. 6 and 9. The numbering of the columns and niches begins in the triconch at the left-hand (west) corner of the north conch and proceeds clockwise (see Fig. 2).

¹⁵ All the column shafts of the lower order of the triconch were considerably shortened at the lower end for use in the church, resulting in the loss of the base profile. One column shaft in the south conch (no. 10) has an ank in low relief, which could be seen about halfway up before the shaft was shortened. Cf. the column shaft of the second column from the east in the north colonnade (Fig. 50), where a decorative motif appears about halfway up the shaft.

¹⁶ Its simply profiled limestone bases may be late antique or reused pieces from the Roman period.

¹⁷ Counting from the east: it is the only standing column in the north colonnade, and it is outside the part of the building now used as a church.

¹⁸ In W. de Bock, *Matériaux pour servir à l'archéologie de l'Égypte chrétienne* (St. Petersburg, 1901), 63, it was presumed by contrast that the

The overwhelming majority of the pieces mentioned so far are granite column shafts; there are as well some granite column bases and one marble column shaft. In other words, old architectural sculptured elements were obtained for the taller columns in the building and in some cases also for their bases.

On top of the outer brick walls there are still considerable remains of the ashlar cavetto, very likely reused pieces, as well as the waterspout with lion head in the west outer wall. In the lower section near the middle of the east outer wall is a reused block with flat relief decoration (basket with grapes).

Elsewhere in the building individual reused carved blocks can be identified, but they cannot be assigned with certainty to the original structure.¹⁹

A.2. *Architectural Elements Decorated for the Building*

All the other visible decorated pieces²⁰ in the triconch together with the crossing including the column shafts and bases of the upper order,²¹ on the sanctuary façade, and in the east colonnade were obviously made specifically for this building, just like the column bases of the lower order of the triconch: they do not support the reused

column shafts were made specially for the church, because the reerected column shaft of the second support of the north colonnade (cf. note 15) shows a christogram. The christogram in the circle is indeed present, but it is executed in such a thin and flat manner that evidently in its place must have been previously an older, somewhat larger decorative motif. On the use of an ankh for relief decoration on a column shaft in the north conch, see note 15. Two column shafts in the former naos measure 423 and 421 cm respectively in height, 59 and 58 cm in diameter at the bottom, and 51 and 53 cm in diameter at the top.

19 A decorative piece on the south pilaster of the north entrance to the side rooms of the triconch (second stone under PC 8) was certainly placed there only in the course of a repair. Hieroglyphs can be seen on the east side of the threshold of the present church door. The reliefs which are walled in above the present church door do not derive, in my view, from the original structure.

20 The sculptured blocks that can be said with certainty, or some probability at least, to have been cut for use in this building have been numbered by me consecutively with an abbreviation referring to their category. The simply decorated bases of the upper order in the triconch and the niches, which are all representatives of a simplified Attic pattern, have not been individually listed.

21 The surface of the first column of the upper order of the north conch (height 214 cm, including the capital [height 29 cm] and the base [height 23.5 cm]) has become easily visible as a result of the restoration. The column shaft has been regularly scraped all round to secure good adhesion for a thin layer of plaster and the subsequent painting.

shafts in a regular way but consist of three or four carefully hewn parts, which were then assembled around the lower portion of the column shaft.²² As a result, at first glance they appear monolithic, and seem to bear the weight of the columns,²³ which in fact were placed directly on the stylobate (Fig. 6).

A.2.1. The column capitals²⁴ in the triconch

The Corinthian capitals of the lower order²⁵ appear much larger than those of the upper order²⁶ (Fig. 6); their upper zones are very broad, so that the breadth at the top of their fronts is substantially greater than that of their sides (Figs. 8, 9).²⁷ This feature, along with their more opulent motifs, sets them off in striking fashion from the narrower Corinthian columns of the upper order, whose motifs are less rich. In this differential weighting, the arrangement follows the custom whereby a distinction is made between the orders of the ground floor and

22 Breadth at the front: 50 cm. These parts are absent from column 5 of the north conch. The modern floor covers the original floor as well as the lower parts of the column bases.

23 Something similar can be seen, for example, in the transept basilica of al-Ašmūnayn/Hermoupolis, where a column shaft is enclosed at the bottom by a two-part limestone column base. There, as in Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, this clever mode of procedure exploited the stability of the hard stone column shaft in its full height, instead of placing the shafts on soft limestone bases.

24 The terminology of late-antique architectural ornamentation, and of the late-antique capital, was, as is well known, developed by German scholars (cf. esp. R. Kautzsch, *Kapitellstudien: Beiträge zu einer Geschichte des spätantiken Kapitells im Osten vom vierten bis ins siebente Jahrhundert* [Berlin–Leipzig, 1936]). The translation of these terms, which were by no means always felicitously chosen in the first place, but which have become international reference terms, is not without its problems. Thus for example the “weichzackiger Akanthus” was translated by W. E. Betsch as “crowded acanthus” (“The History, Production and Distribution of the Late Antique Capital in Constantinople” [Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1977], 55), which, however, makes no clear distinction between this and the “starrzackiger Akanthus,” which can also appear “crowded.” Even less felicitous, in my view, is the term “mask acanthus” (ibid., 188–89), used by W. E. Betsch for “grossgezackter Akanthus,” because it is purely associative, and furthermore relates not to the outline and relief of the individual leaf, but to the negative cut-out shapes between adjacent leaves.

The terms used here are, for the “weichzackiger Akanthus”: “soft acanthus”; for “feingezahnter Akanthus”: “fine-toothed acanthus”; for “Blattgeäst”: “leaf branches”; for “Faltkapitell”: “fold capital”; and for “Kesselkapitell”: “bowl-shaped capital.”

25 Height 37–43 cm.

26 Height 29–33 cm.

27 Breadth (bottom) 36–37, breadth (top) (measured on two examples) 64.5 × 52 cm and 61 × 51 cm respectively.

galleries of churches, in respect both to their size and to the degree of elaboration of their capitals.²⁸

A.2.1.1. LOWER ORDER: CC 1–14 (FIGS. 2, 6–9)

Here we see three variants of a pattern.

Type C1a (Fig. 7): Nine examples (four in the east conch: CC 6–9; four on the corner columns of the side conches: CC 1, CC 5,²⁹ CC 10, CC 14; one example on column 4 of the north conch: CC 4).

- Six lower leaves displayed on three sides of the capital.
- Seven upper leaves visible on three sides of the capital.
- Caules (i.e., stalks carrying the sheath-leaves).
- Sheath-leaves (without helices).
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.³⁰

Type C1b (Fig. 8): Three examples (on column 2 of the north conch: CC 2, and on columns 11 and 13 of the south conch: CC 11, CC 13).

- Six lower leaves displayed on three sides of the capital.
- Only five upper leaves visible on three sides of the capital: on the two lateral sides the central upper leaf is missing and replaced in each case by a leaflet or floral motif.
- Caules.
- Sheath-leaves (without helices).
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

Type C1c (fig. 6, 9): Two examples (in each case on the central columns of the north and south conch: CC 3, CC 12).

- Six lower leaves displayed on three sides of the capital.
- Only five upper leaves visible on three sides of the capital: on the lateral sides, the central upper leaf is missing and replaced in each case by a leaflet or floral motif.
- Caules.
- The sheath-leaves are united with the helices to form a single motif, i.e., the sheath-leaves have attached external helices.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

For all three types, the decoration of the abacus bosses varies.

The distribution of the capital variants reveals an arrangement scheme. Type C1a, which has the most complete set of motifs, appears in the side conches on their corner columns (additionally, on column 4 of the north conch), but fills the east conch with a total of four examples. Type C1c with attached helices emphasizes the central axis of the side conches. The most modest type, Type C1b, occurs only in the side conches: in the south conch twice, between the corner column and the middle column, i.e., on columns 11 and 13, and in the north conch only on column 2. Here, in the north conch, the arrangement scheme is not adhered to (Type C1b should actually appear on column 4), but in my opinion this does not mean that we should be skeptical that a systemic arrangement existed. In view of the regularity of the distribution of the other capitals, it could well be that in the case of capital CC 4 of the north conch we see merely a lapse on the part of the workmen, an error of execution. In spite of the lapse, the arrangement is still effective. It aims above all to set off the east conch against the side conches by the use of four similar and more richly executed capitals and to emphasize the east conch by means of the design of the corner columns of the side conches.

The subtlety of the differences among the three variants is noteworthy: an untrained eye can easily overlook them. The individual responsible for the arrangement scheme assumed that the differentiation in the decoration of the capitals would produce an effect, even though it is not particularly striking.³¹

28 In East Roman art the relatively simple form of the Ionic impost capital was popular for the gallery story. But the important Basilica A in Philippi (built ca. 500) had Corinthian capitals on the ground and gallery floors (P. Lemerle, *Philippes et la Macédoine orientale à l'époque chrétienne et byzantine: Recherches d'histoire et d'archéologie* [Paris, 1945], 405, pl. 28).

29 CC 5 in the north conch shows a special variant (between Types C1a and C1b) on its lateral sides: the capital has a central upper leaf on its southern lateral side, which is missing on the northern lateral side and is replaced by a leaflet. Seen from the center of the triconch, however, CC 5 looks like Type C1a.

30 Cf. below under B.1.1.1.

31 U. Monneret de Villard also overlooked the deliberate differentiation. His judgment of the capitals of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy: "Dans ce

A.2.1.2. UPPER ORDER: CC 15–28

The fourteen capitals of the upper order (Fig. 10)³² reveal no variants, but are all examples of a single pattern, with a substantially reduced set of motifs.

Type C2:

- Three tall lower leaves displayed on three sides of the capital.
- Four upper leaves on the corners.
- No caules.
- Sheath-leaves with outer helices.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

A.2.2. The two capitals³³ of the triumphal arch in the sanctuary façade: CC 29–30 (Figs. 2, 11, 12).

Similarly decorated counterparts (CC 30: Figs. 11, 12).

Type C3:

- Lower leaves.
- Upper leaves (upper part of the central upper leaf with a row of beads on the central rib).
- Caules decorated in three zones.
- Above, in place of the sheath-leaf calyx, a medallion in each case, filled with a Maltese cross, to which a small outer helix with sparse foliage is attached.
- Small necking.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

monument les chapiteaux, bien qu'avec quelque différence dans les détails, sont uniformes. Ils appartiennent au type corinthien, mais manquent de la table supérieure, comme ceux de la madrasa al-Halâwiyya à Alep et certains chapiteaux de Bawit et de Saqqara. Les feuillages sont longues, grêles, secs, avec une pointe qui retombe d'une façon exagérée. Ce modelé donne presque une impression métallique, augmentée par l'exécution minutieuse des globules qui décorent les nervures et des croix et des ronds placés entre les feuilles" (*Couvents* [n. 1 above], 2:125).

32 Height 29–33, breadth (bottom) 22, breadth (top) 40–41 cm.

33 North example CC 29: height 68.5, breadth (bottom) ca. 65, breadth (top) ca. 74 cm. Neither capital is decorated all round, the side facing the wall being left plain, so that the leaves are not complete. This arrangement strengthens our confidence that both capitals are in their original position.

A.2.3. The column capitals in the naos

A.2.3.1. THE TWO TALLER CENTRAL COLUMNS OF THE EAST COLONNADE: CC 31–32 (FIGS. 2, 14–15)

The two capitals are quite different.

North version CC 31 (Figs. 13–14):³⁴

Type C4:

- Eight lower leaves.
- Eight upper leaves.
- Scale-like caules.
- Broad fan of sheath-leaves, in which can be seen a rosette (on two sides)³⁵ or else a figure-eight. No helices.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

South version CC 32 (Fig. 15):³⁶

Type C5a:

- Eight lower leaves.
- Eight upper leaves.
- Decorated caules.
- Broad fan of sheath-leaves, in which on one side there is a flower in a circle. No helices.
- Convex necking with laurel sprig.³⁷
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

34 Height ca. 67, breadth (bottom) ca. 62, breadth (top) ca. 96 cm. Several lower leaves are badly damaged, having lost at least their overhanging central leaf-lobe. It is, however, striking that in addition to the corners and upper leaves, above all on the north side the small boss above the underside of the capital is relatively badly damaged, i.e., in places that could hardly have been affected by the use of violence against the capital in situ. The inference must be that the capital was replaced after it was damaged, for example, after collapsing.

35 On the north and south sides.

36 Height ca. 70, breadth (bottom) ca. 63 cm (D. Kinney). The capital is well preserved, as is its decorated convex necking. There is—in contrast to capital CC 31—no visible indication that it may have been damaged after a collapse, for example, and placed in its present position at a later date.

37 Decorated convex necking had been used in Constantinople since the mid-5th century with composite and bizonal capitals, but not with Corinthian capitals. On a Corinthian column capital with a decorated convex necking from al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos, see Krumeich, *Bauskulptur* (n. 11 above), 1:50; 2:12 (K-32), pl. 23 (date: second quarter to second half of the 6th century).

A.2.3.2. REMAINING COLONNADES

Instead of the south version of the two capitals in the corner positions of the east colonnade, a modern replacement has been deployed.

A.2.3.2.1: North corner position of the east colonnade: CC 33 (Figs. 3, 13, 16)³⁸

Type C5b:

- Eight lower leaves.
- Eight upper leaves.
- Decorated caules.
- Broad fan of sheath-leaves. No helices.
- No necking.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

It is striking that the capitals of the two central columns of the east colonnade CC 31–32 are not similarly decorated as counterparts. One would have expected them—like those of the triumphal arch CC 29–30—originally to have formed a pair with respect to their decoration, and the question arises whether both capitals are in their initial location. To my mind, the facts lead to a dilemma. On the one hand, the capitals CC 31–32 with their heights of ca. 65 and ca. 70 cm are very large specimens, remarkably higher than CC 33, which has a height of only ca. 52 cm. This could mean that CC 31–32 were carved for their special location on top of the two central columns of the east colonnade, whereas the normal colonnade capitals—like CC 33—were planned and executed at a lesser height. In this case we must acknowledge that CC 31–32 were decorated differently because deliberate accentuation was desired. On the other hand, there is further a very large capital, the below-mentioned CC 34 (Fig. 17) in the former north aisle on the floor (underside damaged, height still 63 cm), which with respect to its height and decoration can be attributed to the original building of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy. However, if more than two very large column capitals existed, the height alone of CC 31–32 would not prove that they are situated in their original location in the center of the east colonnade.

The fact that this piece is the only one of the east colonnade capitals with a decorated convex necking supports the correctness of the position of CC 3. This may well suggest that it was chosen for a particularly important position, which is of course the case for the two central

columns of the eastern colonnade. Compared to the excellent conservation of CC 32, the relatively severe damage to capital CC 31 is puzzling.³⁹ In my view, it cannot be excluded that the northern counterpart to CC 32 has been lost and that CC 31 was moved to its present position only later. It is true that old photographs show CC 31 and CC 32 in their present positions prior to the restorations of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe in 1906/7; but a previous loss of the north capital might have led to the use of a large capital to close the conspicuous gap, even if its decoration did not fit with its counterpart. I do not think a final decision between the two alternatives is possible at this time.

One argument speaks for the correct position of CC 33 (height ca. 52 cm): the corresponding pilaster capital PC 2 on the sanctuary façade is of about the same height (ca. 53 cm).

A.2.3.2.2. From one of the colonnades?
CC 34 (Fig. 17)⁴⁰

Type C6:

- Eight lower leaves.
- Eight upper leaves.
- Decorated caules.
- Broad sheath-leaf fan. No helices.
- Medallion with cross on center of the abacus.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

The capital could, on the basis of its dimensions and decoration, come from one of the colonnade columns.⁴¹

38 Height 53, breadth (bottom) ca. 55, breadth (top) ca. 92 cm.

39 Cf. note 37.

40 In the former north aisle on the floor. Underside damaged, height still 63, breadth (bottom) formerly at least 50, breadth (top) formerly 93 cm. I have been unable as yet to determine the origin of the piece, which is not mentioned in the older literature.

41 There is no trace whatever of a somewhat smaller row of columns in the gallery story, as reconstructed by Monneret de Villard, *Couvents* (n. 1 above), 2: fig. 114, as regards either the shafts or the capitals.

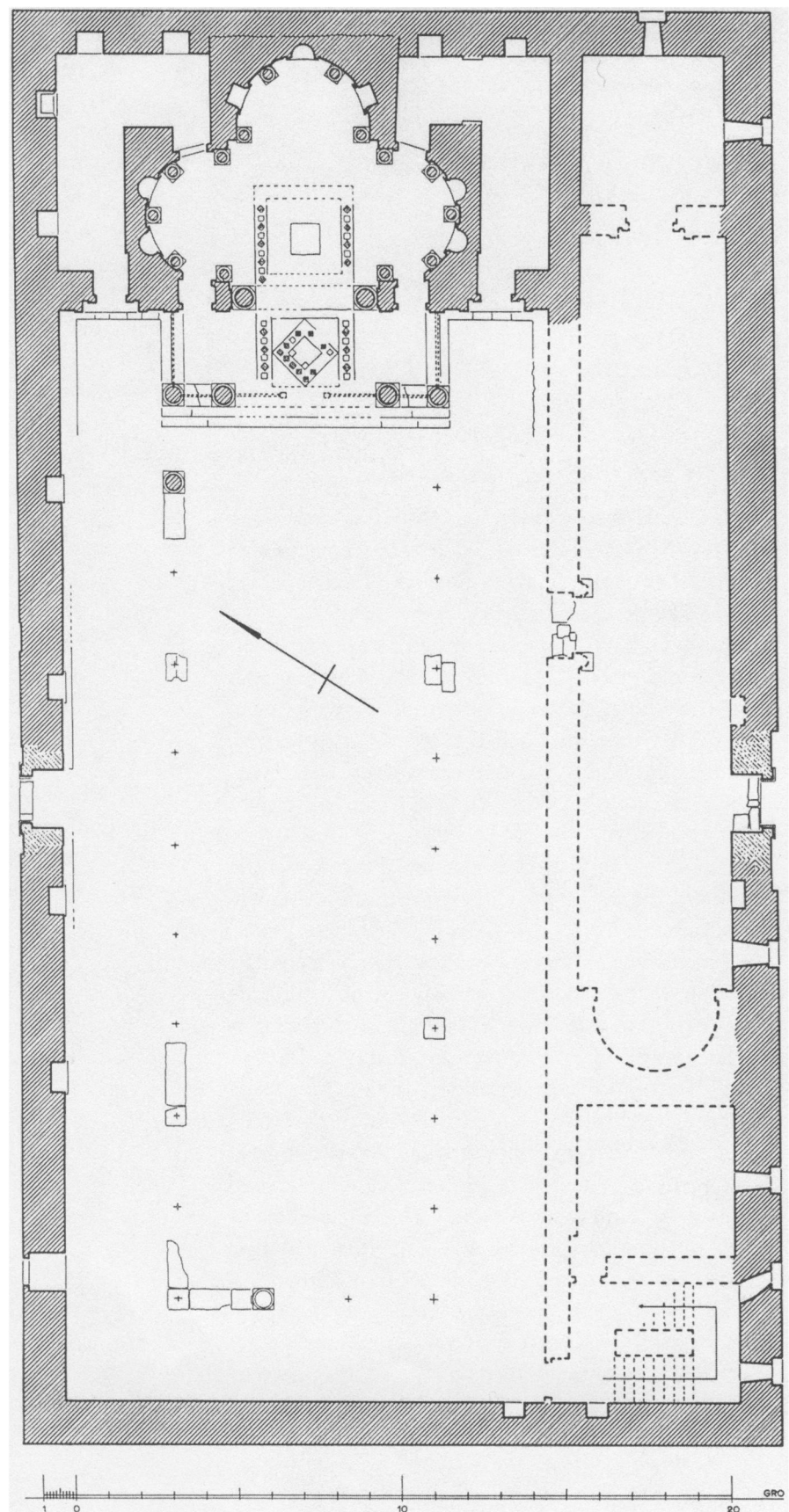


Fig. 1 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, plan of the original structure (P. Grossmann)

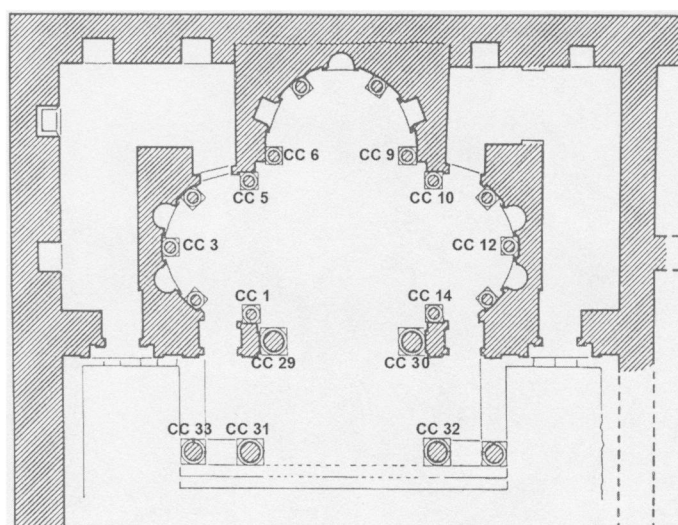


Fig. 2 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, plan of column capitals in the triconch, lower order (CC 1–14), triumphal arch (CC 29–30) and east colonnade (CC 31–33). Unless otherwise specified, all photos and plans are by H.-G. Severin.

A.2.4. Half-column and pilaster capitals

A.2.4.1. SANCTUARY FAÇADE (FIGS. 3–4)

A.2.4.1.1. Large lower orders

A.2.4.1.1.1. *The pilasters corresponding to the two central columns of the east colonnade: PC 1 (Figs. 11, 18)*

In the sanctuary façade there is one pilaster alongside each of the embedded columns of the triumphal arch, corresponding to the opposite large columns of the east colonnade. The capitals of these two pilasters are shorter and do not reach the same impost level as the respective neighboring column capitals of the triumphal arch (CC 29–30). The south pilaster capital has been replaced by a modern reconstruction.

North example: PC 1 (Figs. 11, 18)⁴²

Decorated only on the front side, while the two lateral sides have been left smooth.

Type P1:

- Two lower leaves.
- Two half upper leaves at the corners and a central upper leaf.
- Caules.
- Sheath-leaves with outer helices.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

With its relatively low height, pilaster capital PC 1 was an inadequate match for the opposite column capital of the east colonnade CC 31,⁴³ nor does it look very appropriate positioned directly adjacent to the visibly higher column capital of the triumphal arch CC 29 and compared with the likewise higher pilaster capital PC 2 (Fig. 11). CC 29 is badly damaged at its northwest corner. Should this damage to the column capital have occurred in situ, as a result of the collapse of sections of the superstructure, the directly adjacent pilaster capital would also necessarily have been affected; PC 1, however, has no damage worth mentioning. Since, furthermore, the condition of the ashlar setting beneath the pilaster capital PC 1 is due to a restoration, there is cause for doubt whether the piece is in its original position.

A.2.4.1.1.2. *The pilasters corresponding to the north and south colonnades: PC 2–3*

Somewhat less high than the pilasters at the sides of the triumphal arch, and placed somewhat further out, are the two pilasters on the sanctuary façade, corresponding to the columns of the north and south colonnade of the naos (cf. Figs. 3–4). Their capitals are decorated only on the front side (PC 2–3).

⁴² Height 44, breadth (bottom) ca. 47, breadth (top) ca. 78 cm.

⁴³ Cf. A.2.3.1.

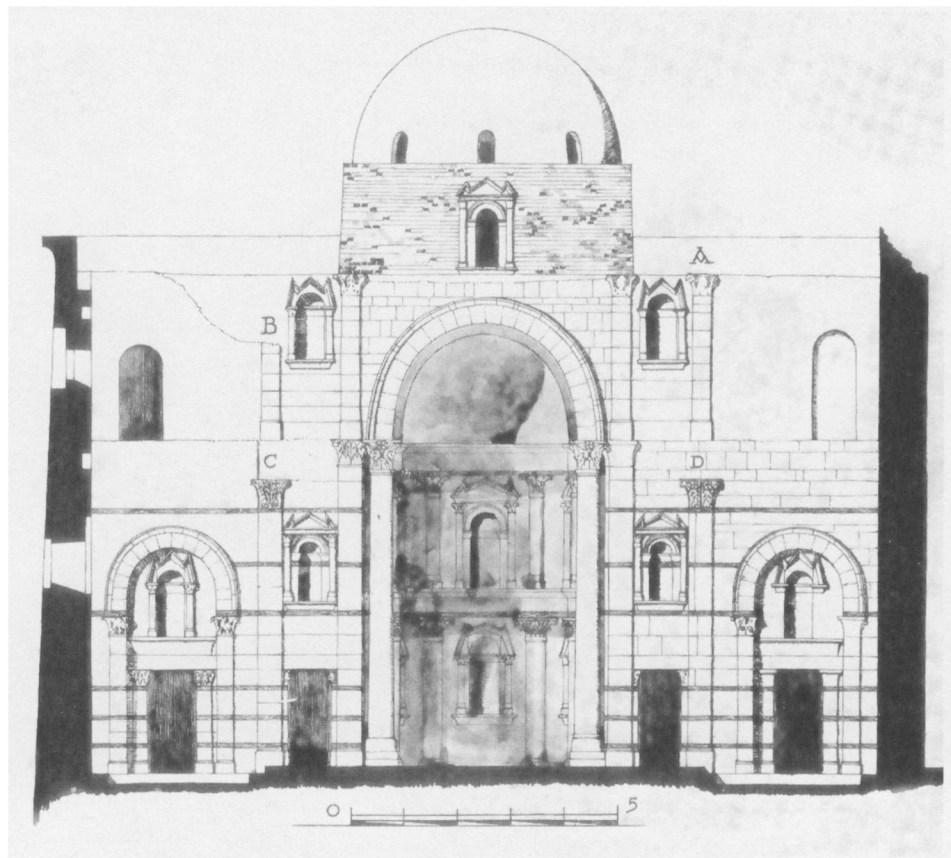


Fig. 3 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, sanctuary façade (after Monneret de Villard, *Couvents*, 2: fig. 116)

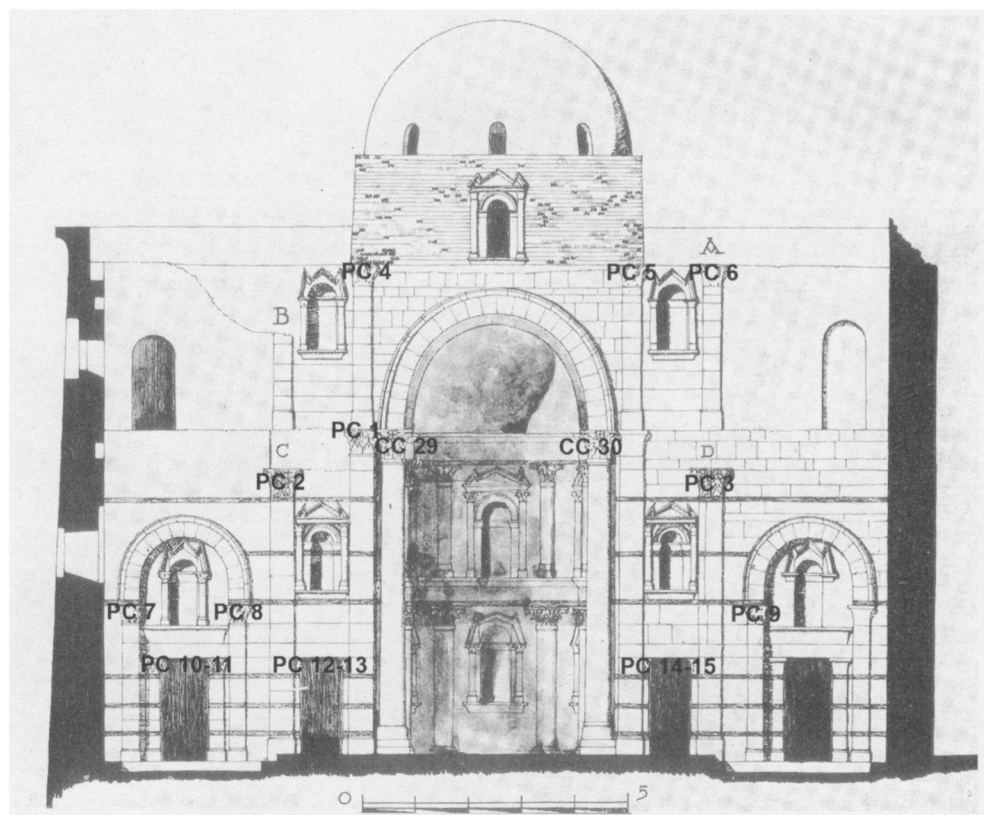


Fig. 4 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, sanctuary façade: pilaster capitals PC 1–15 and column capitals CC 29–30

Type P2a: north example (PC 2;⁴⁴ Fig. 19)

- Instead of the lower leaf there is an unusual combination of motifs: a trefoil is growing out of two tendrils, consisting of a three-toothed motif in each case, the central one being longer; the two tendrils form a heart-shaped interior field, embracing the trefoil, and coming close together at the top; on the outside of each a toothed leaf is attached; over the whole design the traditional overhang⁴⁵ has been preserved.
- Two half upper leaves at the corners and an upper leaf in the middle (all with a row of beads on the central rib).
- Multizonal caules. Above each (instead of the sheath-leaf calyx), a medallion which contains a Maltese cross and to which is attached an outer helix with sparse foliage.
- Foliage design of the upper leaves: "leaf branches."⁴⁶

Type P2b: south example (PC 3; Figs. 20, 29)

- Instead of the lower leaf there is an unusual combination of motifs: a trefoil is growing out of two tendrils, consisting of a three-toothed motif in each case, the central one being longer; the two tendrils form a heart-shaped interior field, embracing the trefoil, and coming close together at the top; on the outside of each a toothed leaf is attached; over the whole design the traditional overhang has been preserved.
- Two half upper leaves at the corners and an upper leaf in the middle (only the central upper leaf with row of beads on the central rib).
- In the middle of the sheath-leaf fan a rosette; outer helices.
- Foliage design of the lateral upper leaves: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.
- Foliage design of the central upper leaf: "leaf branches."

⁴⁴ Height 54.5, breadth (bottom) ca. 49, breadth (top) ca. 78 cm.

⁴⁵ I.e., the projecting and overhanging tip of the central lobe of the acanthus leaf.

⁴⁶ Cf. B.1.1.2., below.

- Both capitals show the same pattern, but they differ in a number of details.

Above these pilasters, or above the impost of their capitals, as the case may be, a strip of wall is free of decoration. This was formerly the course of the architrave.

A.2.4.1.2. Large upper order

A.2.4.1.2.1. *The pilasters in the north section: PC 4*⁴⁷

The north pilaster has not been preserved to its full height.

South example (PC 4; Fig. 21):

Type P1:

- Two lower leaves.
- Two half upper leaves at the corners and a central upper leaf (with row of beads on the central rib).
- Caules.
- Sheath-leaves with outer helices.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

A.2.4.1.2.2. *The pilasters in the south section: PC 5–6*

The south pilaster, in its dimensions and decoration the counterpart of its north neighbor, is, in its upper portion, the controversial result of the restoration of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe dating from the early years of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ However,

⁴⁷ Height 37, breadth (bottom) 44.5, breadth (top) 69 cm.

⁴⁸ de Bock, *Matériaux* (n. 18 above), pl. 25 and Monneret de Villard, *Couvents*, 1: fig. 46: in these old photographs the top of the pilaster is still absent. Monneret de Villard, *Couvents*, 2: 74, 97 strongly favored a lesser height for the pilaster, stating that the present height was an error committed during restoration; the correct height, he said, documented by his own observations before the restoration, was rather the smaller value, which he himself had indicated in his reconstruction drawing (*ibid.*, 2: fig. 114: here the northern part of the sanctuary façade is drawn). This conclusion has been adapted by Evers and Romero, "Rekonstruktion" (n. 8 above), 180. These authors preferred a lesser height for the pilaster (and its counterpart in the north sanctuary façade) since it stood in the way of the roof of the galleries, whose height is indicated by beam holes. On the other hand, if the pilaster was lower than it is today, its capital, whose breadth at the top was certainly greater than the breadth of the pilaster, would come painfully close to the pilaster of the immediately adjacent niche; moreover, one has to say that the niche, flanked by a high and a considerably lower pilaster, would not present a very convincing picture; in its present position, however, flanked by a pair of



Fig. 5 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, sanctuary façade, detail

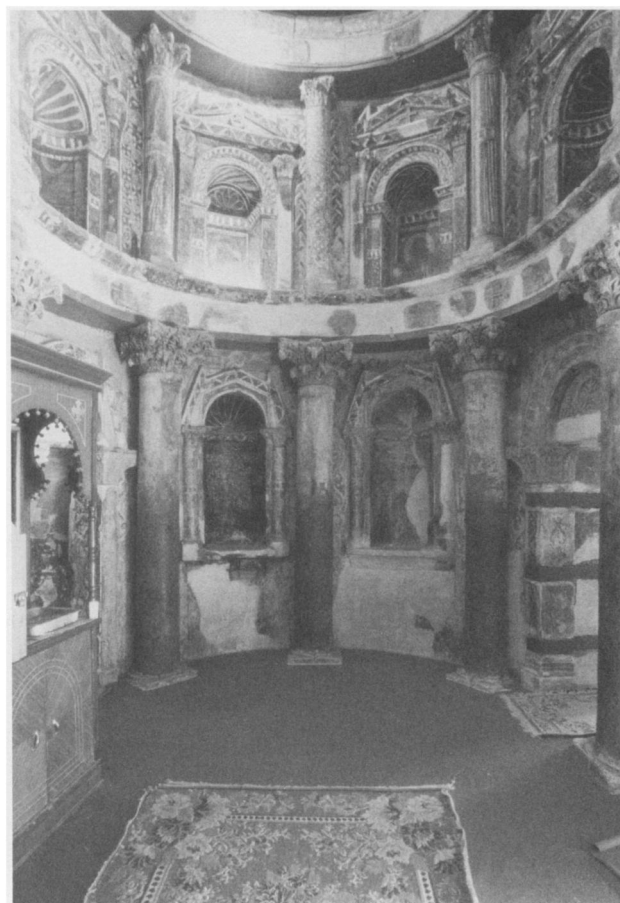


Fig. 6 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, south conch

the capital placed on this pilaster at that time may well be a rediscovered original.⁴⁹

North and south examples (PC 5–6).

Like PC 4: Type P1.⁵⁰

- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

pilasters of equal height, it comes across as architecturally unobjectionable, the reservations of Monneret de Villard and of Evers and Romero notwithstanding.

⁴⁹ Missing decorative items have been replaced elsewhere by a modern reconstruction.

⁵⁰ More detailed assessment of the capital was prevented by poor light and by its position.

A.2.4.1.3. Medium and smaller lower orders (at openings and doors)

A.2.4.1.3.1. *The openings from the aisles to the lateral side rooms of the triconch*

A.2.4.1.3.1.1. The framing pilasters together with arch above: PC 7–9

On the north side both pilasters have been preserved (PC 7–8: Figs. 4, 22), on the south side, only the one to the north (PC 9: Figs. 4, 23); the one to the south has been replaced by a modern reconstruction.

Pilaster capitals decorated on two sides meeting at right angles, front and sides identical.



Fig. 7 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, south conch, lower order: CC 14, Type C1a front and side



Fig. 8 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, north conch, lower order: CC 2, Type C1b side



Fig. 9 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, north conch, lower order: CC 3, Type C1c side



Fig. 10 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, north conch, upper order: CC 17, Type C2

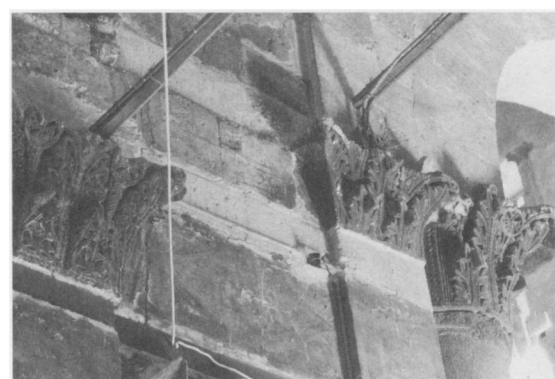


Fig. 11 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, sanctuary façade: PC 2, PC 1, CC 29



Fig. 12 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, sanctuary façade, triumphal arch: CC 30



Fig. 13 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, east colonnade: CC 31, CC 33



Fig. 14 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, east colonnade, central columns: CC 31



Fig. 15 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, east colonnade, central columns: CC 32

Type P3a:

- Two lower leaves (with row of beads on the central rib).
- Two half upper leaves at the corners and a central upper leaf (with row of beads on the central rib).
- Caules consisting of a row of beads.
- Sheath-leaves with outer helices, some indeed with inner helices.⁵¹
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

A.2.4.1.3.1.2. The pilasters flanking the doors: PC 10–11

The pilaster capitals of the south door have been replaced by reconstructions.

Pilaster capitals of the north door (PC 10–11): decorated on two sides meeting at right angles, front and side identical.

Type P3b:

- Two lower leaves (with row of beads on the central rib).
- Two half upper leaves at the corners and one central upper leaf.
- Caules consisting of a row of beads.
- Sheath-leaves with outer helices.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

A.2.4.1.3.2. The west entrances of the west passages: PC 12–15

The capitals of the northerly west passage are relatively poorly preserved (PC 12–13).

Capitals of the southerly west passage: PC 14–15. Decorated on two sides intersecting at right angles.⁵² It is surprising at first that the sides of the capitals in the sanctuary façade, normally seen as the front or main sides (Figs. 3–4, 24), are narrower than the “subsidiary” sides in the opening itself (Fig. 25). This probably does not mean that the broader sides of the capitals in the soffit of the opening should be seen as main sides or as a particular accentuation. Rather,

⁵¹ In the south example PC 8 is well preserved (Fig. 22).

⁵² North example: height 37; front: breadth (bottom) 12, breadth (top) 25 cm; side: breadth (bottom) 24.5, breadth (top) 40 cm. South example: height 36; front: breadth (bottom) 12; side: breadth (bottom) 26 cm.

this strange phenomenon can be explained by the fact that the neighboring pilasters of the large orders intersect with sides of the pilaster capitals in the sanctuary façade, so that, as it were, only one half of this side of the capital is visible (cf. Figs. 3–4, 24–25). In fact the front sides in the sanctuary façade reveal precisely half of the usual decorative motifs. The capitals are higher than those at the east end of the opening, PC 16–19.

Type P4a:

—front (Fig. 24 right):

- One lower leaf.
- Half an upper leaf at the corner and one central upper leaf.
- Caules.
- Sheath-leaf with small volute.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

—side:

- Two lower leaves.
- Two half upper leaves at the corners and one central upper leaf.
- Caules.
- Sheath-leaves with outer helices.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

The two pilaster capitals of the north opening are clearly to be assigned to this type.

Type P4b (Figs. 24–25):

- The north example of the south opening (PC 14) has a special feature. The lower region of the single lower leaf on the front side is replaced by a leaf growing from two heart-shaped tendrils; above it projects the overhang of the central leaf-lobe of the traditional acanthus leaf (Fig. 25). The counterpart PC 15 shows in this position a "normal" acanthus leaf with the foliage design of the Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus (Fig. 24).



Fig. 16 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, east colonnade, north corner: CC 33



Fig. 17 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, former north aisle: CC 34



Fig. 18 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, sanctuary façade: PC 1

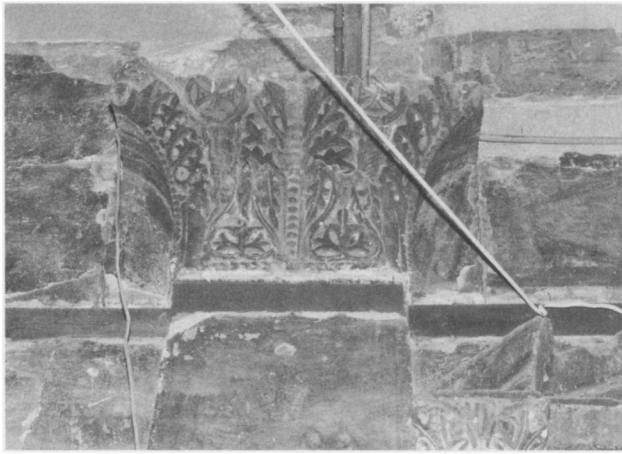


Fig. 19 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, sanctuary façade: PC 2



Fig. 20 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, sanctuary façade: PC 3



Fig. 21 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, sanctuary façade: PC 4



Fig. 22 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, sanctuary façade: PC 8 front



Fig. 23 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, sanctuary façade: PC 9 side



Fig. 24 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, sanctuary façade: PC 14-15 fronts



Fig. 25 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, sanctuary façade: PC 14 front and side



Fig. 26 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, south conch, east entrance of the west passage: PC 19

A.2.4.2. TRICONCH

A.2.4.2.1. The east entrances to the west passages: PC 16–19 (PC 18–19: Figs. 26–30)

Decorated on two sides intersecting at right angles, front and sides identical. However, the fronts are narrower and slightly curved in line with the curvature of the conch, while the sides are broader and straight.⁵³ The capitals are noticeably smaller than those at the west end of the opening, PC 12–15.

Type P₅ (PC 19: Figs. 26, 30):

- One high lower leaf (with row of beads on the central rib).

⁵³ Dimensions in the passage in the south conch: height 28–30, breadth (bottom) of the front 18, of the sides 27.5 and 23.5 cm.

- Two half upper leaves at the corners.
- Sheath-leaves with outer helices.
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

A.2.4.2.2. The west entrances of the east passages: PC 20–23

In their dimensions and design, these are like pilaster capitals PC 16–19, i.e., Type P₅.

A.2.4.3. THE NICHEs

The half-columns and pilasters of the niches⁵⁴ have Corinthian capitals whose motifs are heavily shortened, while the details are more varied, more playful than methodical.

Type C₇ in the case of half-column capitals.

Type P₆ in the case of pilaster capitals (figs. 27–28).

- Two lateral half-leaves.
- Caules, in some cases clearly visible, in some cases covered.
- Sheath-leaf, as a rule with outer helices.⁵⁵
- Foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

A.2.4.4. THE WINDOW OPENINGS IN THE CROSSING

The north, east, and south walls of the crossing each have three rectangular window openings.⁵⁶ Their decoration consists of a load-bearing cavetto and two flanking elements, which in turn bear a cavetto. The flanking elements are two half-columns, two pilasters, and two half-columns respectively. The west wall has two smaller lateral niches and a central window opening: here the flanking elements are two pilasters in each case.

The pilaster and half-column capitals follow the simple Types C₇ and P₆, as used in the niches of the upper order in the triconch: two lateral half-leaves, sheath-leaf, as a rule with outer helices.

⁵⁴ On the niche types, see under A.2.5.

⁵⁵ Cf., however, the right-hand niche in Fig. 28 with a well-preserved pilaster capital without helices. Because of poor light, an evenhanded and thorough examination of the small details was not possible.

⁵⁶ The whole area has been greatly changed by repairs and restoration.



Fig. 27
Dayr Anbā Bīšūy,
east conch, lower order:
niche Type N1b

A.2.5. On the niches and pediments in the triconch and on the sanctuary façade

The numerous niches preserved in the triconch and on the sanctuary façade can be divided into two basic types with two variants each. In this case the shapes of the niches in the wall—with rectangular or semicircular cross-sections—seem to be a less important factor, whereas the type of decoration is more striking.

Basic Type N1: the hollow in the wall is framed by two supports with profiled bases and Corinthian capitals, between which there is a horizontal cornice, and crowned by a composite round pediment.

This basic type appears in two variants:

Type N1a in niches of semicircular cross-section: the hollow of the wall is overhung by a semi-dome and framed by half-columns with profiled bases and half-column capitals. Pediment: the parts of the lateral broken pediments which have been left smooth project slightly from the central field, but their points do not take up the projection; the cornice is placed in a single relief plane.

Type N1b in niches of rectangular cross-section (Fig. 27): the hollow of the wall is overhung by a barrel vault and framed by pilasters with profiled bases and pilaster capitals. Pediment: the parts of the lateral broken pediments which have been left smooth project slightly from the central field, but their points do not take up the projection; the cornice is placed in a single relief plane.

Basic Type N2: the hollow in the wall is framed by shallow pilasters with bases and undecorated imposts, between which there is a horizontal cornice, and crowned by an arch. This inner composition is flanked by supports with profiled bases and Corinthian capitals, on which there is a composite triangular pediment. Originally, every niche probably had a motif in the field of the pediment, deliberately varied at least in the triconch.⁵⁷

This basic type appears in two variants:

⁵⁷ These motifs have, for example, been preserved in niches 4, 9, and 10 of the upper order of the triconch (cross in wreath, cross, four-petaled flower) and in some niches of the sanctuary façade (cross).



Fig. 28 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, north conch, upper order: niches Type N2b

Type N2a in niches of semicircular cross-section (Fig. 29): the wall hollow is overhung by a calotte. The outer flanking supports are half-columns with half-column capitals. Pediment: the horizontal cornice is bent above the half-columns, while the crowning cornice by contrast is in a single relief plane.

Type N2b in niches of rectangular cross-section (Fig. 28): the hollow in the wall is overhung by a barrel vault. The outer flanking supports are pilasters with pilaster capitals. Pediment: the horizontal cornice is bent above the pilasters, while the crowning cornice by contrast is in a single relief plane.

These four types had already been used in the architectural decoration of the church in the Shenute monastery.⁵⁸ There, they are as a rule deployed on the Roman niche-alternation principle, i.e., the alternation of niches of semicircular and rectangular cross-section respectively.

A.2.5.1. THE NICHES IN THE TRICONCH

In the east conch the niches with semicircular and rectangular cross-section alternate one by one, whereas an even number of niches—in the lateral conches—results in an arrangement in pairs. In the lower and upper orders, only one basic type is used in each, i.e., basic type N1 in the lower order, basic type N2 in the upper order. Their variants and cross-sections in the two stories are

each deployed alternately in their horizontal as well as in their vertical sense like a checker pattern (with the above-mentioned exception of pairs in the lateral conches).

East conch—lower order: The central niche (no. 6) is Type N1a, the two outer niches (nos. 5 and 7) are Type N1b (Fig. 27).

East conch—upper order: the central niche (no. 6) is Type N2b, the two outer niches (nos. 5 and 7) are Type N2a.

North and south conches—lower order: the two central niches (nos. 2 and 3, 9 and 10) are Type N1a. In place of the two outer niches are the fronts of the passages leading to the east and the west; these are logically, so to speak, treated as niches of rectangular cross-section, in that they are framed by pilasters.

North and south conches—upper order: the two central niches (nos. 2 and 3, 9 and 10) are Type N2b (Fig. 28); the two outer niches (nos. 1 and 4, 8 and 11) are Type N2a.

A.2.5.2. THE NICHES IN THE SANCTUARY FAÇADE

Of the seven niches in the sanctuary façade, six are likewise arranged in pairs. The two outer niches, placed over the doors to the side rooms of the triconch, are Type N1b. The two niches between the pilasters of the large order, over the openings to the side conches, are Type N2a (Fig. 29), and the two niches situated axially above in the gallery story are again Type N1b. The single niche placed centrally above the triumphal arch is Type N2a

⁵⁸ Type N1 is dominant in the triconch. Type N2 is to be found above all in the west narthex. Of little use regarding the architectural decoration is P. Akermann, *Le décor sculpté du Couvent Blanc: Niches et frises* (Cairo, 1976), cf. the review by H.-G. Severin, *BZ* 73 (1980): 101–2.

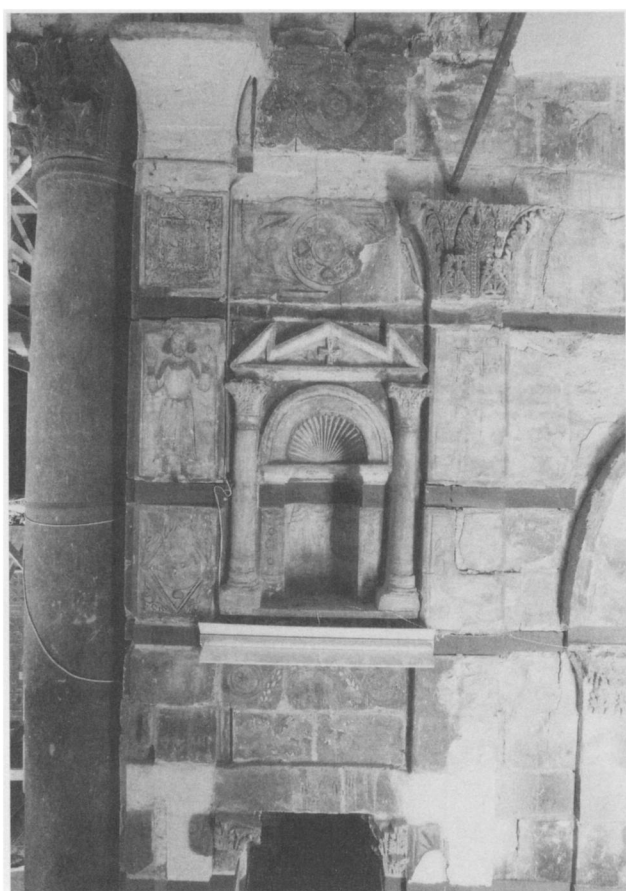


Fig. 29 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, sanctuary façade, south section: niche Type N2a and PC 3



Fig. 30 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, south conch, east entrance of the west passage

(Fig. 48)⁵⁹ with unique and particular decoration. Accordingly, on the sanctuary façade only two of the four types are represented. In the case of Type N2a, the calottes are scallop shaped (Figs. 29, 48), which, in the case of the corresponding niches in the sanctuary, was indicated only by painting.

A.2.5.3. THE PEDIMENTS OVER THE ENTRANCES TO THE EAST AND WEST PASSAGES

In the two side conches are passages to the east (to side rooms) and west (to the naos). These passages are, as

it were, in place of rectangular niches, and therefore decorated with pilasters and a composite pediment. It is striking that the doors of the east passages, although they were partly visible from the naos and easily visible from the entrance to the triconch, have merely profiled pediments, originally decorated with painting (G 3–4). The doors of the west passages, which can be seen only from the interior of the triconch, are by contrast distinguished by sculptured composite pediments (G 1–2: Fig. 30). There is no immediately obvious reason for this conspicuous preferential treatment. Possibly the emphasis on the entrances to the west passages was liturgically determined. In any case, I should like to conclude from this architectural accentuation that the main direction was seen as the exit from the side conch into the naos, and not the other way around.

⁵⁹ According to de Bock, *Matériaux* (n. 18 above), 66, and Clarke, *Antiquities* (n. 8 above), 168, the niche, together with the wall section above the eastern triumphal arch, collapsed at an unknown date and has been restored in modern times. It remains unclear whether the niche was originally at this position.

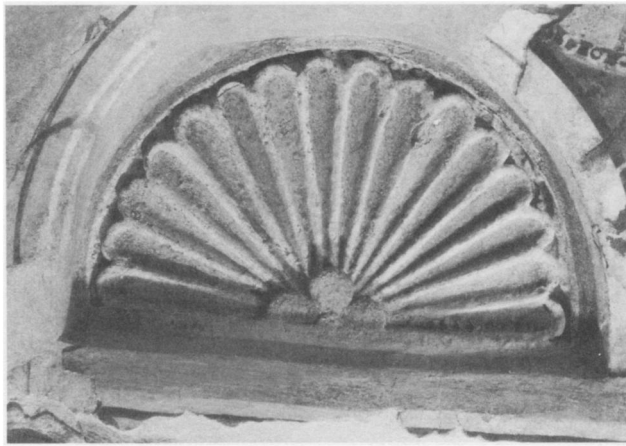


Fig. 31 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, north conch, keystone



Fig. 33 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, ibid. PC 24 front

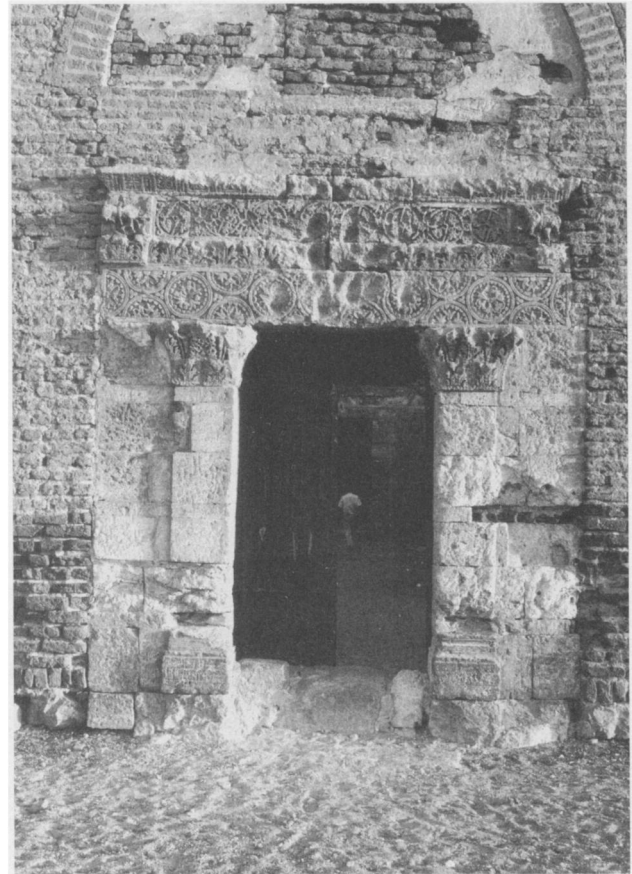


Fig. 32 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, north outer wall, exterior: north door

A.2.5.3.1. The east entrances to the west passages: G 1–2

Composite pediment (Fig. 30).⁶⁰ Parabolic arch field. The parts of the lateral broken pediments which have been left smooth project minimally from the central field, but their points do not take up the projection; the cornice is placed in a single relief plane. The decoration of the central field: large medallion with relief-like Maltese cross. Decoration of the cornice: corbel cornice with similar floral filling.

These pediments correspond to the pediments of the niche-Type N1b, but are larger and the decoration is more detailed (crowning cornice).

⁶⁰ Example in the south conch: height 73, breadth (bottom) 131 cm. Width of the central field 76 cm. The lateral broken pediments project at the bottom ca. 1.5 cm from the central field.



Fig. 34 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, *ibid.* PC 25 side



Fig. 35 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, south outer wall, exterior: detail of the south door



Fig. 36 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, *ibid.* PC 26 front

A.2.5.3.2. The west entrances to the east passages: G 3–4

Composite pediment. Parabolic arch field. The parts of the lateral broken pediments which have been left smooth project minimally from the central field, but their points do not take up the projection; the cornice is placed in a single relief plane. No sculpted decorative details.

These pediments correspond to the pediments of the niche-Type N1b, but are larger.

A.2.6. The keystones of the conch calottes

Semicircular blocks with scallop-decoration in high relief are inserted as keystones of the calotte vaulting (Fig. 31).⁶¹

⁶¹ Scallop-decorated circular keystones also in the vaultings of the small rooms besides the east conch.



Fig. 37 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, *ibid.* PC 27 front and side



Fig. 38 al-Ashmūnayn/Hermoupolis, transept basilica, column capital



Fig. 39 Banī Suwayf, episcopal collection, column capital (photo P. Grossmann)



Fig. 40 Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, column capital from al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos (photo K. Krumeich)

A.3. *Reused Late Antique Sculpted Construction Elements*

A.3.1. The doors in the outer walls

A.3.1.1. THE NORTH DOOR

A.3.1.1.1. North side

The exterior of the north door (Fig. 32)⁶² consists in its present condition of unskillfully assembled, reused sculpted construction elements, whose combination reveals no understanding of classical or late-antique decorative associations.

Arrangement of limestone sculpted construction elements⁶³ in surrounding brickwork.

Sequence of the friezes above the capitals (from bottom to top):

1. Frieze with semicircles and circles,⁶⁴ monolithic.⁶⁵
2. Frieze with standing leaves and two protruding corner fields, four blocks.⁶⁶
3. Band of interlocked circles and two protruding figurally decorated corner fields, five blocks.⁶⁷
4. Corbel cornice, four or five blocks.⁶⁸

The individual decorative pieces still have to be analyzed in detail in order to establish their dating and to resolve the question of whether they belong to the building.

A.3.1.1.1.1. *Pilaster capitals: PC 24–25 (Figs. 33–34)*

The two pilaster capitals are decorated on two sides meeting at the corner.⁶⁹

⁶² Cf. Monneret de Villard, *Couvents* (n. 1 above), 2:127–28, fig. 150.

⁶³ Breadth 321.5 cm (the corbel cornice is even broader); the clear width of the door accounts for 133.5 cm of this.

⁶⁴ Remains of inscription on the upper bead.

⁶⁵ Height 39, breadth 312 cm.

⁶⁶ Height 19.5 cm.

⁶⁷ Height 28.5 cm. Roughly in the middle, incomplete loop motifs touch each other.

⁶⁸ Height 15–16 cm. To the side the cornice runs, decorated, into the wall.

⁶⁹ East example: height 43, breadth (bottom) front 42, breadth (bottom) side 35 cm; breadth (top) not accurately measurable. West example: height 42.5, breadth (bottom) front 42.5 cm. The decoration of the sides is badly damaged, abraded, or erased. The sides of both capitals, which are too broad for the pilasters below (breadth 37.5 cm), were shortened to fit in the present position.

Type P7a:

East version (PC 24).

—front (Figs. 32–33):

- Two lower leaves.
- Two half upper leaves and one central upper leaf.
- Caules.
- In place of the sheath-leaves, medallions. The upper corners are heavily damaged; there are curved stems preserved which very likely ended in helices.
- Foliage design of the lower leaves and the lateral upper leaves: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.
- Foliage design of the central upper leaf: Imitation of the fine-toothed acanthus.

—side:

- Heavily damaged.
- Caules.
- Foliage design of the upper leaves: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

Type P7b:

West version (PC 25).

—front (Fig. 32):

- Two lower leaves.
- Two half upper leaves and one central upper leaf.
- Caules.
- In place of the sheath-leaves, medallions with a star. The upper corners are heavily damaged; there are curved stems preserved which probably ended in helices.
- Foliage design of the lower leaves and the lateral upper leaves: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.
- Foliage design of the central upper leaf: "leaf branches."

—side (Fig. 34):

- Heavily damaged.
- Caules.
- Foliage design of the lateral upper leaves: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.
- Foliage design of the central upper leaf: "leaf branches."

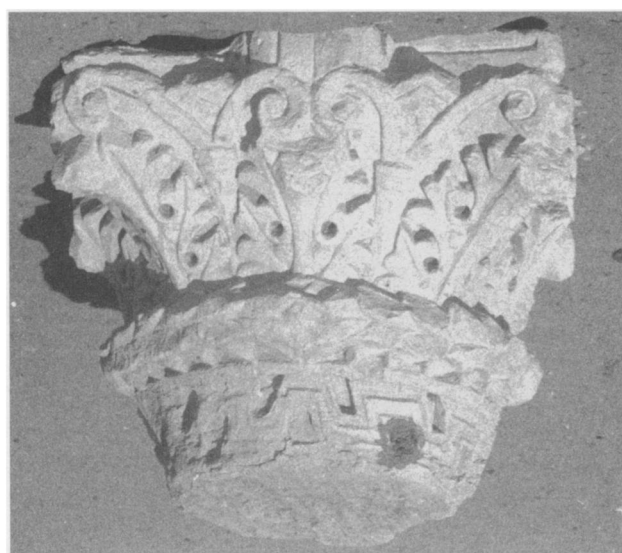


Fig. 41 Umm al-Baraygāt/Tebtynis, column capital (photo P. Grossmann)

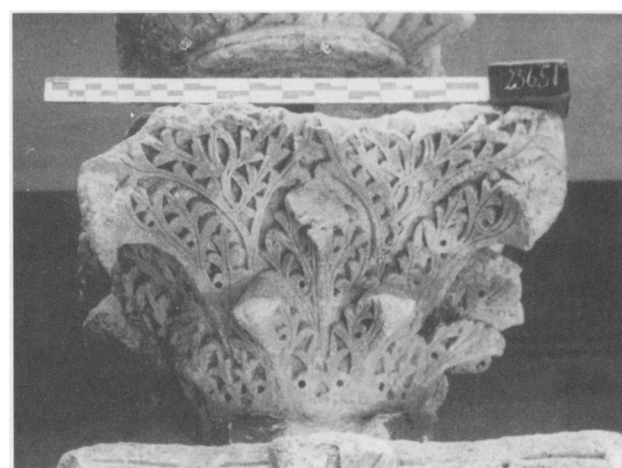


Fig. 42 Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, column capital from al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos (photo courtesy of the museum)

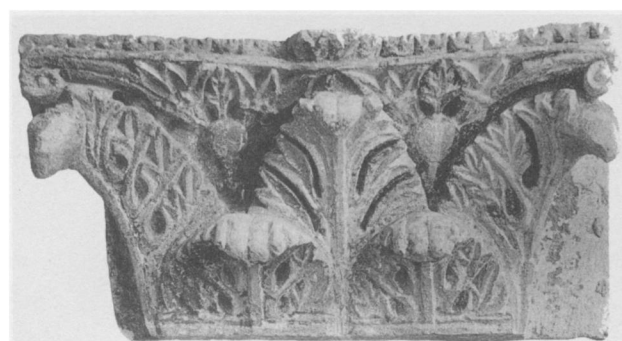


Fig. 43 Paris, Musée du Louvre, pilaster capital from Bawīt (after Chassinat, *Fouilles*, pl. 65.1)

In contrast to the lower leaves and the half upper leaves, which manifest “normal” foliage design, the central upper leaf on the front of PC 24 is modeled in the manner of the fine-toothed acanthus of Byzantine architectural sculpture production in marble (Fig. 33).⁷⁰

The pilaster capitals PC 24 and PC 25 reveal, by the use of different leaf outlines, by the medallions, and by the emphasis on the central upper leaf, relationships to the pilaster capitals PC 2 and PC 3 which can be found in situ on the sanctuary façade, so that they could possibly have formed part of the original structure of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy.

A.3.I.I.2. South side

On the south side of the north door is inserted, beneath a block with cavetto, a decorated frieze block with two protruding parts (Fig. 50).⁷¹

A.3.I.2. THE SOUTH DOOR

A.3.I.2.1. South side

The outside of the south door (Fig. 35)⁷² also consists of unskillfully assembled reused decorative elements.

The sequence of the friezes above the pilaster capitals (from bottom to top):

1. Frieze with tendrils,⁷³ monolithic.⁷⁴
2. Frieze with double tendrils, over it a frieze with leaves and stalks, four blocks, on the right complete, on the left cut into.⁷⁵
3. Frieze with loops and foliage, five blocks.⁷⁶
4. Cornice with various leaf motifs, non-uniform, six blocks.⁷⁷

To each side, one small niche.

A.3.I.2.1.1. Pilaster capitals: PC 26–27 (Figs. 36–37)

The pilaster capitals, reworked and rehewn for their present position, have decoration on two sides meeting at the corner.⁷⁸ On the front side of the block, next to each pilaster capital (Figs. 35–36), starts a frieze of standing acanthus leaves with the foliage design: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

Type P8a

—front (Figs. 35–36):

- Two lower leaves.
- Two half upper leaves at the corners and one central upper leaf.
- Thin caules with grooves.
- Sheath-leaves with cross in circle, maybe without helices (corners badly damaged).
- Foliage design of the lower leaves: “leaf branches.”
- Foliage design of the upper leaves: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

Type P8b

—side (Fig. 37):

- In place of two lower leaves, in each case one triple motif growing from two tendrils, in each case in the south “lower leaf” made up in cruciform fashion of a three-toothed leaf, and in the north “lower leaf,” as lateral components of the triple motif, in each case a short stalk with three round spherical motifs; a multi-toothed leaf is attached in each case to the two tendrils that surround the trefoil and almost meet at the top; the overhang of the acanthus leaf has been preserved throughout.
- Two half upper leaves at the corners and one central upper leaf.
- Only one thin grooved caulis and one sheath-leaf (in each case on the south side, toward the corner).

70 Cf. B.I.I.2.

71 Height of the block 39 cm.

72 Cf. Monneret de Villard, *Couvents*, 2:127, fig. 149.

73 The underside shows remains of an ancient Egyptian relief, cf. note 12.

74 Height 40 cm.

75 Height 34 cm.

76 Height 32 cm.

77 Height approx. 20 cm.

78 West example: height 46.5, breadth (bottom) front 38, breadth (bottom) of the front of the block including leaf frieze 55, breadth (bottom) side still 35, breadth (top) side approx. 66 cm. East example: height 46, breadth (bottom) front 39, breadth (bottom) of the front of the block including leaf frieze 50, breadth (top) approx. 70, breadth (bottom) side still 35 cm. The frieze pieces beneath each capital are mitered.

- Foliage design of the upper leaves: Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus.

The two pilaster capitals PC 26–27 present on their sides the motif which also appears on pilaster capitals on the sanctuary façade, namely on the two large pilaster capitals PC 2–3 (Figs. 19–20) and on the narrow front side of the pilaster capital PC 14 (Figs. 24–25): replacement of the lower parts of the acanthus leaf by a trefoil growing out of two tendrils. As the capitals of the south door—like those on the sanctuary façade—also use different foliage design on the same side of a capital, and the cross in the medallion (cf. also the capitals of the triumphal arch CC 29–30: Fig. 12), the similarity seems so great that one could ascribe them to the workshops involved with the original construction of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy and recognize in them the remaining parts of a door of the original building; a question-mark remains, however, since on the one hand the outer helices on the larger pilaster capitals of the sanctuary façade do not seem to appear on PC 26–27, while on the other hand the asymmetry of the sides of PC 26–27 (Fig. 37) is not attested on the sanctuary façade.

The main sides of the pilaster capitals PC 26–27 are flanked on their outer sides by a frieze of standing acanthus leaves. The beginning of this frieze is preserved on the blocks of both capitals, and doubtless it was continued on the originally adjoining sculpted blocks, although it is not known how far. We have in other words a highly individual door, whose combination with the adjacent frieze does not occur for example in the sanctuary of the church.⁷⁹ If one wishes to assign the pilaster capitals PC 26–27 to the original structure, the best position for such a preferentially decorated door would doubtless be the now vanished portal, which once led from the south transverse room into the naos (Fig. 1). Another candidate might be the door of the room once situated at the east end of the south transverse room (Fig. 1).

A.3.1.2.2. North Side

Four small friezes consisting of several blocks are inserted into the ashlar work on the north side of the south door.

⁷⁹ The original doors in the outer walls were probably plain, or in any case not richly decorated, corresponding to the doors in the outer walls of the church in the Shenute monastery (cf. Monneret de Villard, *Couvents*, 2: figs. 145–47).



Fig. 44 Cairo, Coptic Museum, column capital from Umm al-Barayğāt/Tebtynis: front



Fig. 45 Ibid.: side



Fig. 46 Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, pilaster capital from al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos (photo K. Krumeich)



Fig. 47 Dayr Anbā Šinūda, narthex, east wall: niche



Fig. 48 Dayr Anbā Bišūy, sanctuary façade: central niche above the triumphal arch

B. Interpretation of the Architectural Decoration

B.1. *The Typological Position of the Capitals*

In the second half of the fifth century, as part of the process of compressing and reducing the quantity of motifs,⁸⁰ Egyptian architectural sculptors fused two originally separate elements of the traditional Corinthian capital, the sheath-leaves and the outer helices, into a single motif on column capitals (Fig. 38);⁸¹ in the subsequent period the helices were often omitted, so that the sheath-leaf calyx reached into the corner of the capital (Fig. 39).⁸²

The fourteen lower-order column capitals in the triconch of Dayr Anbā Bišūy are diversified with three variants (Type C1a–c). If, as often happens, one considers only the relevant degree of evolution, i.e., in this case the degree to which classical formal associations have been dismantled, the two column capitals of Type C1c with outer helices in the lower order of the triconch (Figs. 6, 9)⁸³ appear relatively old-fashioned, and the twelve column capitals of Types C1a and C1b without outer helices (Figs. 7–8)⁸⁴ by contrast relatively progressive.⁸⁵ This discriminatory assessment does not do justice to the total picture of the architectural decoration of the church, as can be seen from the fact that the two representatives of Type C1c have been deployed to emphasize the central axis of the side conches (Figs. 2, 6, 9). Moreover, all the Corinthian column capitals of the upper order of the triconch still have helices (Type C2: Figs. 6, 10).

Furthermore, all the visible large-pilaster capitals in the triconch and on the sanctuary façade also have

80 Krumeich, *Bauskulptur* (n. 11 above), 1:47.

81 This stage is represented in Dayr Anbā Bišūy by, e.g., the two column capitals of Type C1c (Figs. 10–11). Good examples are also provided by the few capitals made for the transept basilica of al-Ašmūnayn/Hermoupolis (Fig. 38): A. J. B. Wace, A. H. S. Megaw, and T. C. Skeat, *Hermoupolis Magna, Ashmunein: The Ptolemaic Sanctuary and the Basilica* (Alexandria, 1959), pl. 23.4; pl. 24.1, 4, 6; pl. 27.5, 10; Pensabene, *Elementi* (n. 11 above), 437–39, nos. 558–63, pls. 65–66.

82 This stage is represented in Dayr Anbā Bišūy by, e.g., the capitals of Type C1a–b (Figs. 7–8). Cf. also a capital in the episcopal collection of Banī Suwayf (Fig. 39): Height 38, breadth (bottom) 34, breadth (top) 59 cm: H.-G. Severin, “Problemi di scultura tardoantica in Egitto,” *Corsi Rav* 28 (Ravenna, 1981): 323–25, figs. 6–7 and the capitals of tomb no. 42 in the northern necropolis of al-Bahnāsā/Oxyrhynchos (Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:158–59; 2:8 [K-17, K-18], pl. 6 d).

83 CC 3 and CC 12.

84 CC 1–2, CC 4–11, CC 13–14.

85 Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:47.

helices. But they cannot be regarded as old-fashioned for this reason alone, since some of them (PC 2–3, PC 14) have elements that go furthest in deforming the acanthus leaf, far beyond all the column capitals in the building, and thus represent the most modern phenomena in the architectural decoration of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy.

B.1.1. The foliage design of the acanthus leaves

Kirsten Krumeich recently presented a graphic and detailed systematic analysis of late-antique acanthus-leaf design in Egypt, paying particular attention to the architectural sculpture of al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos,⁸⁶ to which the ornamentation of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy can be related.

Given the large number of decorated elements and the correspondingly extensive involvement of different stonemasons or stonemasons' workshops in the construction of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, it is not surprising that the foliage designs of the acanthus leaves vary within a narrow range. With a few pronounced exceptions, they adhere to a basic common type.

B.1.1.1. THE NORMAL FOLIAGE DESIGN: AN EGYPTIAN LATE FORM OF THE SOFT ACANTHUS

Characteristic is a relatively simple and austere, roughly arch-shaped outline of the leaf, which the lobes endeavor to fill, even though they are represented unequally in a distorted form. The topmost tooth of any one lobe is strongly emphasized, conspicuously extended and standing out against the other teeth, and in addition attached to the central tooth of the lobe, not to the leaf-stalk, so that a long and striking dark furrow separates it from the leaf-axis.⁸⁷

While this description of the foliage design is still valid for capitals in the church of the mid-fifth-century church of the Shenute monastery, some acanthus shapes in Dayr Anbā Bīšūy go considerably further than this, inasmuch as the gap between the topmost tooth of a leaf and the next lobe is closed, so that the striking dark furrow is integrated as a negative space into the interior shape of the leaf (cf., e.g., Figs. 7–10, 15–16).⁸⁸ While these

kinds of foliage design elsewhere often use only three-toothed lobes,⁸⁹ we quite frequently find four-toothed lobes in Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, e.g., in the capitals of the two orders in the triconch (cf., e.g., Figs. 8–10).

This foliage design is used on all the capitals in the building. On pilaster capitals PC 2 and PC 3, PC 14, PC 24 and PC 25 as well as PC 26 and PC 27, we also see, alongside it, other foliage designs or substitute forms.

B.1.1.2. IMITATION OF THE FINE-TOOTHED ACANTHUS AND "LEAF BRANCHES"

The fine-toothed acanthus⁹⁰ is known in Egypt through marble imports from Constantinople and through marble imitations produced domestically,⁹¹ but was very seldom used in local production in limestone.⁹²

In Dayr Anbā Bīšūy we see an imitation of the fine-toothed acanthus only on the reused corner pilaster capital of the north door PC 24 (which cannot be assigned with certainty to the original structure of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy), on the central upper leaf of the front (Figs. 32–33).⁹³ In fact the leaf does not imitate accurately the fine teeth of the examples from Constantinople, but it follows them in their detailed chiaroscuro, their lively total impression, and the restlessness of the surface pattern.⁹⁴

It is noteworthy that the imitation of the fine-toothed acanthus, so infrequent in Egyptian architectural

the leaf resulting from the cut-outs by closing the last gap between the uppermost tips of the leaves and the next lobe, which increasingly turns the cut-out into a component of the leaf-lobe."

89 Cf. leaf type Ak 1-d in *ibid.*, 1:33–34 and text ill. 1.

90 Most recently U. Peschlow, "Kapitell," *RAC* 20:96–98.

91 On the occurrence of the fine-toothed acanthus in Egypt, see H.-G. Severin, "Konstantinopler Bauskulptur und die Provinz Ägypten," in *Spätantike und byzantinische Bauskulptur: Beiträge eines Symposiums in Mainz, Februar 1994*, ed. U. Peschlow and S. Möllers (Stuttgart, 1998), 93–104, esp. 97–98, pl. 29.1–2; pl. 30.9–12; Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:42–45.

92 Cf. Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:42–44.

93 See above, A.3.1.1.1.1. Already noticed by *ibid.*, 1:42 note 283. The two pilaster capitals are thus somewhat isolated in the architectural decoration of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy. On the other hand, in my opinion they indicate, through the use of different foliage designs and by emphasizing the central upper leaf, that they are at the same stage of development as PC 2–3 and PC 26–27. If they did not belong to the original structure, they must have been obtained from the immediate surroundings of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, and it would be a very unusual coincidence if recourse had been made to stylistically just the right sculptured elements for precisely this occasion.

94 Cf. Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:43.

86 *Ibid.* 1:30–45, text ill. 1–3.

87 *Ibid.* 1:30–31.

88 Cf. the description in *ibid.*, 1:33–34 (here in translation): "In the church of the filial monastery of Dēr Anbā Bīšūy by contrast it becomes clear that there was an endeavor to avoid the threatened dissolution of

sculpture production in limestone, is now attested for the Sühāḡ region.⁹⁵ Hence it appears that local stonemasons were interested in the imitation of modern forms from Constantinople, and capable of executing them.

To be distinguished from the fine-toothed acanthus is the so-called “leaf branches” design, a new form developed in East Roman art on the basis of the fine-toothed foliage design: in the words of Krumeich, “a late form, in which it is already no longer possible to speak of a leaf with a closed outline. The individual lobes have taken on a life of their own, and they are only loosely connected to the stem by a thin stalk. They cover the Kalathos with a dense network of leaf-teeth, which are still reminiscent of the fine-toothed forms, but in size and character now approach the *kleingezacktes* foliage design”⁹⁶ Krumeich has already compiled occurrences of the “leaf branches” in the local limestone sculpture of Egypt.⁹⁷ They can be found—after preliminary stages⁹⁸—for example on a column capital in the north church in Bawīt,⁹⁹ on pilaster capitals reused in the south church of Bawīt¹⁰⁰ (Fig. 43), in capitals from al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos (Fig. 42),¹⁰¹ and on an unpublished column

capital in Umm al-Barayḡāt/Tebtynis in the Fayyūm (Fig. 41).¹⁰²

In Dayr Anbā Bīšūy we see “leaf branches” or similar abstract forms of the acanthus leaf in the upper leaves of the large pilaster capitals on the sanctuary façade PC 2 (Fig. 19) and PC 3 (here only on the central upper leaf: Fig. 20), and on the two reused corner pilaster capitals of the south door PC 26 and PC 27, in each case in the lower leaves on the front side (Figs. 35–36).

In all six examples (PC 2–3, PC 24–25, PC 26–27) the fine-toothed acanthus or the “leaf branches,” as the case may be, are not deployed on the total appearance of the foliage, but only as a partial element in the capital, and so in every case other leaf designs, as a rule the Egyptian late form of the soft acanthus, compete with the fine-toothed acanthus and the “leaf branches.”

In addition this group includes four examples (PC 2–3 and PC 26–27)—and here there is an important connection—which also use the trefoil growing out of two tendrils instead of the traditional lower leaf.

B.1.2. The trefoil growing out of two tendrils forming a heart shape

In three positions on the sanctuary façade, namely, on the large pilaster capitals PC 2 and PC 3 (Figs. 19–20) and on the front of the small corner pilaster capital PC 14 (Figs. 24–25), as well as on the sides of the medium-sized corner pilaster capitals PC 26 and PC 27 of the south door (Fig. 37), which cannot be assigned with certainty to the original structure of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, we have a very unusual combination of motifs, which has already been emphasized during the discussion of the individual sculpted pieces.

In all five occurrences the central rib and the lateral lobes of the traditional acanthus leaf of the Corinthian capital have been replaced by an upright, mostly three-lobed formation, or leaflet, growing out of two tendrils which form a heart shape, but above this strange motif we nevertheless have the usual overhang.

¹⁰² Not inspected. Limestone, height approx. 42 cm. I am indebted to P. Grossmann for a photo of the capital. The zone with the meander decoration is in the tradition of Alexandrian art; on classical examples cf. Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:50–51; the zone is set off from the capital by a boss with a laurel branch. The “leaf branches” correspond in large measure to Type Bg 3; cf. *ibid.*, 1:38, text ill. 3, 44–45. On a similar piece from the 6th century from al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos, see *ibid.*, 2:13 (K–36), pl. 25.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 1:42.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 1:43 (in German). For *kleingezackter Akanthus* cf., e.g., Peschlow, “Kapitell,” 94–96.

⁹⁷ Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:42–45.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:43 lists, for example, two column capitals from Saqqāra in Cairo’s Coptic Museum: (1) inv. no. 8268: J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara*, 4 vols., (Cairo, 1906–1912), 3:104, pl. 27.1; Pensabene, *Elementi* (n. 11 above), 446, no. 588, pl. 68; (2) no inv. no., Journal d’Entrée no. 39930: Quibell, *Excavations* 3:104, pl. 23.3; Pensabene, *Elementi*, 448, no. 592, pl. 69.

⁹⁹ Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. no. 7179 (Journal d’Entrée no. 35819): H.-G. Severin, “Beispiele der Verwendung spätantiker Spolien: Ägyptische Notizen,” in *Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst F. W. Deichmann gewidmet*, 3 vols. (Mainz, 1986), 2:103–4, pl. 17.2 (in location in which it was found); Pensabene, *Elementi*, 449–50, no. 596, pl. 69; Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:43, fig. 12.

¹⁰⁰ For example É. Chassinat, *Fouilles à Baouît*, 1.1 (Cairo, 1911), pl. 65 (= here Fig. 43); Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:44–45 (“probably around the middle or in the early second half of the 6th century”). On the reuse of older building materials from which the south church was built, cf. H.-G. Severin, “Zur Süd-Kirche von Bawīt,” *MDAIK* 33 (1977): 113–24; Severin, “Beispiele,” 101 note 4. In the Louvre, where extensive parts of the architectural decoration of the south church of Bawīt are kept and displayed, a dating of the building to the mid-6th century is, however, resolutely maintained; cf. by contrast Grossmann, *Architektur* (n. 1 above), 523–25, fig. 142 (“to be dated to the Umayyad period at the earliest”).

¹⁰¹ Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum no. 23651 (Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:43–44, 51–52; 2:12–13 [K–35], pl. 26 = here Fig. 42) and no. 23755 (*ibid.*, 1:43, 62–63; 2:33 [Pk–55], pl. 41).

Individually, we can attest the following differences:

PC 2 (Fig. 19): The two tendrils appear next to each other beneath the overhang, their origin being invisible, extend in a curve outwards and meet beneath the central axis of the motif, enclosing a roughly heart-shaped field. To either side of the overhang a five-lobed leaf hangs down slightly obliquely; a connection with the neighboring tendril is not entirely clear, but probable. Each of the lobes of the trefoil has three teeth, the lateral lobes pointing slightly obliquely upward, while the central lobe is larger.

PC 3 (Fig. 20): the tendril is similar to PC 2, but it takes a more angular course. On the right-hand "lower leaf" the trefoil is shaped similarly to that on PC 2, while on the left-hand "lower leaf" the lateral lobes are horizontal.

PC 14 (figs. 24–25): the tendrils are very similar to those on PC 2. The leaf has several lobes, but no clear tripartite structure.

PC 26 and PC 27, sides (Fig. 37): the field enclosed by the tendrils is less spacious than on PC 2–3 and PC 14, and the lobes of the trefoil are approximately the same size. The right-hand "lower leaf" on PC 26 and the right-hand "lower leaf" on PC 27 (Fig. 37) have a three-toothed central lobe, while each of their lateral lobes takes the form of a short stalk with three small spherical motifs.

What is the nature and origin of the trefoil growing out of two tendrils beneath an overhang? Its major components are (A) the overhang, (B) heart-shaped tendril sections, and (C) a tripartite motif with a central lobe and various lateral details: (a) lateral lobes pointing slightly obliquely upward, (b) lateral lobes horizontal, (c) lateral lobes with a short stalk and three small spherical motifs.

The overhang is the element that is left over from the traditional acanthus leaf. It has been retained in order to preserve the familiar relief of the "lower leaf" with the corresponding shading effect, particularly in the context of the column capitals and the "normal" pilaster capitals (cf. Fig. 11). All the more alien is the tripartite motif growing out of two tendrils instead of a central rib and the lateral sections of the lower leaf.

In view of the alien nature of the unambiguous leaves of this pilaster capital, the motif cannot be an acanthus leaf. It is true that the trefoils look somewhat like small acanthus leaves, but the phenomenon of the "acanthization" of foliage of various provenance, at least in

the sixth century, is known from Constantinople and elsewhere.¹⁰³ What complicates matters even further is that one probably cannot assume that the strange "lower-leaf" motif of the pilaster capitals was "invented" for the Dayr Anbā Bīšūy building, or that the stonemasons were told to base their work on a particular model. The deviations listed above under C a–b point rather to the repetition of an already familiar formulation with slight variations, at least in the case of the pilaster capitals PC 2, PC 3, and PC 14, which are in situ. This would imply the possibility that a hitherto unknown pattern was being followed.

Actually there seems to be no corresponding example in the architectural ornamentation either of Constantinople or of Egypt. Still, the limestone architectural sculpture of Egypt provides a very similar motif, with a genesis as follows.

In the large transept basilica of al-Ašmūnayn/Hermoupolis, which was built after the middle of the fifth century,¹⁰⁴ we see the preliminary stages of a dissolution of the Corinthian canon resulting from the insertion of small upright leaves in the sheath-leaf calyx of Corinthian capitals (Fig. 38).¹⁰⁵

On a Corinthian column capital of the first half of the sixth century, in the episcopal collection of Banī Suwayf, we see on the main side the motif of the acanthized vine-leaf hanging into the sheath-leaf calyx (Fig. 39).¹⁰⁶

On Corinthian column and pilaster capitals from al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos, as well, all of them datable after the early sixth century,¹⁰⁷ we see acanthized vine-leaves hanging into heart-shaped tendril sections in the sheath-leaf calices (Fig. 40).

¹⁰³ Cf., for example, F. W. Deichmann, *Studien zur Architektur Konstantinopels im 5. und 6. Jahrhundert nach Christus* (Baden-Baden, 1956), 81–82.

¹⁰⁴ Grossmann, *Architektur*, 441–43; summary of the dating approaches in Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:21.

¹⁰⁵ Pensabene, *Elementi* (n. 11 above), 438–39, nos. 558–63, pls. 65–66; Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:49, fig. 13.

¹⁰⁶ Severin, "Problemi" (n. 82 above), 323–25, fig. 7; the dating is derived from Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:48–49.

¹⁰⁷ Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum no. 23649 (Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 2:11–12 [K–31] pl. 24 [date: 2nd quarter to 2nd half of the 6th century]); no. 23651 (ibid., 2:12–13 [K–35] pl. 26 [date: 2nd quarter to 2nd half of the 6th century]); no. R 530 (ibid., 1:63; 2:33 [PC–56] pl. 41 [date: end of 1st third of the 6th century]). On a column capital of unknown provenance in the Coptic Museum Cairo (no inv. no.), only one longish leaf is hanging in the sheath-leaf calyx (Pensabene, *Elementi*, 449, no. 595, pl. 69).

On fold capitals and bowl-shaped capitals, which, in view of the Constantinople models, cannot date from before the time of Justinian I, the motif of vine leaves (albeit not acanthized but with positive ribs) hanging into heart-shaped tendrils has become the dominant one in the total décor.¹⁰⁸ The motif also appears singly in a striking position on the abacus.¹⁰⁹

The cited examples, however, all use the motif with the hanging leaf; in the “lower leaves” of the pilaster capitals in Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, it occurs rotated through an angle of 180 degrees, i.e., with an upright leaf. One cannot deny a similarity, but, in view of the rotation, it is hard to imagine that we have here a genuine relationship or association. An upright leaf can be found quite often in the sheath-leaf calices of Corinthian pilaster capitals of the sixth century,¹¹⁰ but the tendril sections here do not enclose a heart-shaped field. In other words, we can attest only a similarity with heart-shaped tendrils with a hanging leaf, all of them in sixth-century examples; there is still no graphic evidence for the derivation of the motif in Dayr Anbā Bīšūy.

The attempt to determine the nature of the upright leaf also suffers from the circumstance that all the examples demonstrate slight variations. I have not found any convincing associations with palmette ornamentation. The fact that the leaf is only three-lobed does not in itself exclude a vine leaf.¹¹¹ But the characteristic structure of three-lobed acanthized vine leaves in local Egyptian architectural decoration includes inward-curving teeth at the foot of the leaf (Fig. 42),¹¹² a detail absent from Dayr Anbā Bīšūy. The three spherical motifs that appear on each “lower leaf” on the pilaster capitals PC 26 and PC 27 alongside the central leaf (Fig. 37) could mean that

vine leaves were intended and that the stonemasons were vaguely aware of the nature of the leaf, but in view of the other occurrences, that is not at all certain.

B.1.3. Combination of various foliage designs, partial replacement of the acanthus leaf

Finally it must be asked whether the historical peculiarity of the pilaster capitals PC 2–3 and PC 14, as well as PC 26–27, can be assigned to a particular period. Two components are especially important in this connection: (1) the use of different foliage designs on a single capital and (2) the replacement of the lower leaves by a new motif. The question is, in other words, when did the critical situation for limestone architectural sculpture of Middle and Upper Egypt arise, in which several foliage designs were used at once on the Corinthian capital and at the same time the traditional lower leaf was replaced.

Another example, using rather different motifs but nonetheless fulfilling both conditions, comes from a different cultural landscape, namely Middle Egypt; it is a Corinthian column capital with a rectangular impost from Umm al-Barayḡāt/Tebtynis in the Fayyūm (Figs. 44–45), which is kept in Cairo’s Coptic Museum.¹¹³ One upper leaf (Fig. 44) has a more differentiated foliage design than the others,¹¹⁴ and in the lower capital zone there are, alongside the ribs of the upper leaves covering or intersecting with its lower lobes, large, horizontally limited basket-like weaves, exactly in the position elsewhere occupied by the lower leaves (Fig. 44). Patrizio Pensabene has suggested that the basket weave of bizonal capitals and bowl-shaped capitals¹¹⁵ (both of which are attested for the Fayyūm and even for Tebtynis itself)¹¹⁶ are imitations of Byzantine models of the late fifth and early sixth centuries (bizonal capitals) or Egyptian formulations under the influence of the Constantinopolitan impost capitals (bowl-shaped capitals), and he has rightly dated the column capital from Tebtynis to the second third of the

108 Selected examples: (1) fold capital in Cairo, Coptic Museum (no inv. no., Journal d’Entrée 24.11.20.16) from Saqqāra (Quibell, *Excavations* [n. 98 above], 3:103, pl. 21.3; G. Duthuit, *La sculpture copte: Statues, bas-reliefs, masques* [Paris, 1931], pl. 48c; Severin, “Bauskulptur,” 103, pl. 33, fig. 25) and (2) bowl-shaped capital in the Coptic Museum no. 8362 (Journal d’Entrée no. 45394) from al-Ašmūnayn/Hermoupolis (Duthuit, *Sculpture*, pl. 48d; Pensabene, *Elementi*, 463, no. 662; Severin, “Bauskulptur” [n. 91 above], 103, pl. 33, fig. 26).

109 See the examples mentioned in note 110.

110 For example from Bawīt (Chassinat, *Fouilles* [n. 100 above], pls. 51–52 [with a clearly split foot], 53.1, 65, 106.2; Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:49); probably from al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos (Cairo, Coptic Museum no. 4675; H. Zaloscer, *Une collection de pierres sculptées au Musée Copte du Vieux-Caire [Collection Abbās el-Arabī]* [Cairo, 1948], 58, no. 35, pl. 19; Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:42, 86).

111 On three-lobed vine leaves cf. Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:84–85.

112 Cf. *ibid.*, 1:83–86 and text ill. 4 (Wb 3–a and Wb 3–b).

113 No. 10186 (Journal d’Entrée no. 55963): Pensabene, *Elementi*, 450, no. 597, pl. 70 (no inv. no. or provenance).

114 *Ibid.*, 450 (“avvolto da otto alte foglie d’acanto, con lobi a dentelli distinti da zone d’ombra ogivali: queste sono piccole, ad occhiello, nella foglia centrale di uno dei lati”).

115 *Ibid.*, 465, nos. 669–71, pl. 75 (all examples from the 6th century).

116 Documented, to the best of my knowledge, by two unpublished bowl-shaped capitals with basket weave in the Coptic Museum Cairo, inv. nos. 8680 and 8687 (Journal d’Entrée no. 55965).

sixth century.¹¹⁷ Upper Egypt was clearly less familiar with recent creations from Constantinople.¹¹⁸ Consequently, recourse was had, where necessary, to other means when it came to reshaping the Corinthian capital.

The column capital from Tebtynis and our pilaster capitals PC 2–3, PC 14, and PC 26–27 show, in my opinion, comparable peculiarities in respect to their stylistic development. The capital from Tebtynis is more radically altered: the lower leaves are totally absent, and instead a quotation from recent fashionable shapes is inserted. The pilaster capitals in Dayr Anbā Bišūy replace the central rib and the lateral lobes of the lower leaves by a heterogeneous motif, perhaps already known on Corinthian capitals, but the capitals retain the traditional overhang. In both cases, modern details were used in an endeavor to update and enhance the traditional Corinthian capital; in fact, this alteration seriously vitiated the structure of the traditional acanthus leaf.

In view of the commonalties of intention, it is impossible to date the said pilaster capitals of Dayr Anbā Bišūy before the second third of the 6th century.

Some further examples fulfill, in each case, only one of the two named conditions, i.e., the combination of

various foliage designs or the partial replacement of the acanthus leaf; together, however, they can reinforce the dating proposed here.

A column capital from al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos in the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria¹¹⁹ shows, on sides separated by grooves, two different forms of the acanthus leaf design or the "leaf branches."¹²⁰ It has been convincingly dated by Krumeich to the "second quarter or second half of the 6th century."¹²¹ In the case of two pilaster capitals which were reused in the south church in Bawīt, two or even three different foliage designs have been used in each case.¹²² One of these shows a recognizable form of the "leaf branches" (Fig. 43), which suggests a date "around the middle or in the early part of the second half of the 6th century."¹²³

In a pilaster capital from al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos in Alexandria's Graeco-Roman Museum¹²⁴ the lateral leaf lobes of the two acanthus half-leaves have been changed into a notched tendril stalk with pomegranates; only the stem of the leaf and three tips of the overhang are extant (Fig. 46).¹²⁵ Krumeich's dating, which includes the structure of the central upright vine leaf,¹²⁶ is "late to post-Justinian"¹²⁷ or "late 6th century."¹²⁸ Insofar as it represents an attempt to enhance the Corinthian capital, by altering the lower leaves through the inclusion of heterogeneous details, but retaining the overhang, this capital resembles the pilaster capitals PC 2–3 and PC 14 in Dayr Anbā Bišūy; thus they can all be dated to the same time range.

117 Pensabene, *Elementi*, 450.

118 As far as I know, the southernmost place in Egypt in which impressive marble capitals of the 6th century have been found, namely a set of four very respectable impost capitals from the time of Justinian, is al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos, some 300 km from Alexandria. (On several capitals there cf. P. Grossmann, "Wiederverwendete spätantike Kapitelle aus der Moschee von Bahnasā," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 11 [1999]: 185–90, pls. 28, 29 a–b; Krumeich, *Bauskulptur* [n. 11 above], 1:23–28; 2:3–4 [M–1 to M–8], pls. 15–16). In the somewhat more southerly mosque of al-Lāmāṭī in al-Minyā several dozen late-antique marble capitals have been reused, including mostly Corinthian capitals, two bizonal capitals, one composite capital, one fold capital (middle third of 6th century, an Egyptian [Alexandrian?] copy of a Constantinopolitan model). Sūhāḡ is another 240 km or so further southeast of al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos. The carved marble blocks used in the church of the Shenute monastery (Dayr Anbā Šinūdā) for later repairs and other marble materials on the site, of unknown origin, are not impressive and can in no way be regarded as Constantinopolitan samples. For this reason I cannot presume that Constantinopolitan exemplars were available in Sūhāḡ whereas K. Krumeich could with justification do so for Oxyrhynchos; therefore I restrict myself to local production in limestone. However, the architectural sculpture of al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos recommends itself for comparison, as the work of K. Krumeich makes it currently the best-investigated regional production in Egypt.

Addendum: In April 2007 I found within a heap of stones in the narthex of Dayr Anbā Šinūdā a heavily damaged fold capital (marble; height 43.5, breadth [bottom] 37 cm), undoubtedly a Constantinopolitan original from the middle third of the 6th century; this interesting piece proves that impressive Constantinopolitan marble capitals were available as far away as the south border of the *Thebais Prima*.

119 No. 23651; limestone, height 45 cm, breadth (bottom) 31, breadth (top) 72 cm; Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:43–44; 2:12–13 (K–35), pl. 26.

120 The front half shows "leaf branches" Bg 3, the back half Bg 2 (cf. Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:30–45, esp. 44–45, text ill. 3).

121 Ibid., 2:11–13. However, when the capital was in situ, the two different forms of the acanthus leaf could probably not have been seen at the same time.

122 Chassinat, *Fouilles* (n. 100 above), pls. 64, 65.

123 Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:44–45 (on Chassinat, *Fouilles*, pl. 65).

124 No. 23425; Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:62–63; 2:33–34 (PC–57), pl. 41.

125 In Constantinopolitan art, overhangs over tendrils (in this case, circular loops with leaves) can be seen on the sides of the main capitals in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (532–37), in the central axis on the volutes: H. Kähler, *Die Hagia Sophia: Mit einem Beitrag von C. Mango über die Mosaiken* (Berlin, 1967), figs. 72–73. Reference to this motif: R. Brūx, *Falkapitelle: Untersuchungen zur Bauskulptur Konstantinopels* (Langenweißbach, 2008), 166.

126 Of Type Wb 4, see Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:80–88, text ill. 4.

127 Ibid., 1:62–63.

128 Ibid., 1:86–87.

B.2. *The Typological Position of the Niche Decoration*

In the upper order of the triconch and in some positions of the sanctuary façade, the semicircular niches of Type N2a are flanked by half-columns, and the rectangular niches of Type N2b by pilasters, while they are surmounted by a composite pediment (Figs. 28–29, 48). This arrangement had already been used in the church of the Shenute monastery.¹²⁹ But there the structure of the niche is even more clearly influenced by tradition (Fig. 47): in the undecorated horizontal zone, which lies above the capital and below the horizontal cornice of the composite pediment, two projections bear the load of the slightly projecting corners of the horizontal pediment cornice¹³⁰—an element which still clearly abuts on to the friezes below the archetypal Ptolemaic pediment.¹³¹ In the pediments of this type in Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, the undecorated zone by contrast is flat (Figs. 28–29, 48),¹³² and the projecting corners of the horizontal pediment cornice are no longer supported from below: the pediment hovers freely (see especially Figs. 29 and 48) a few centimeters above the load-bearing elements. This reveals a typological step in the dismantling of classical tectonics which goes considerably beyond the niches in the church of the Shenute monastery and consequently points to a more advanced date.

129 Cf. note 58.

130 Another niche is illustrated in Severin, “Dekor” (n. 11 above), 77, fig. 16.

131 Fundamental for the understanding of late-antique composite pediments in Egypt is M. Bergmann, “Perspektivische Malerei in Stein: Einige alexandrinische Architekturmotive,” in *Bathron: Beiträge zur Architektur und verwandten Künsten; Für H. Drerup zu seinem 80. Geburtstag* (Saarbrücken, 1988), 59–77. For the best Ptolemaic comparandum, the so-called Palazzo delle Colonne in Ptolemais, see G. Pesce, “Il ‘Palazzo delle Colonne,’” in *Tolemaide di Cirenaica* (Rome, 1950), 27, fig. 16, pl. 10; 13a; H. Lauter, “Ptolemais in Libyen: Ein Beitrag zur Baukunst Alexandrias,” *JDAI* 86 (1971): 163, 166, 170–73, fig. 15; idem, *Die Architektur des Hellenismus* (Darmstadt, 1986), 139, fig. 49a.

132 In the niches of the upper order in the triconch (tip of the composite pediment approximately 5.36 m above ground level) this zone is about 9 cm high. In the south niche of the sanctuary façade (between the pilasters of the large lower order [Fig. 29]; tip of the composite pediment approximately 4.55 m above ground level), about 3 cm.

C. Triconch and Total Structure: Construction Phases or Allocations?

Peter Grossmann has established that the triconch at Dayr Anbā Bīšūy is not of one piece with its rear side wall (Fig. 1); likewise, joins can be seen in the west entrance walls of the two side rooms of the triconch.¹³³ He concluded from this that the triconch was originally freestanding, and that the rest of the church was added in a second construction phase.¹³⁴ He supported a supposition I had expressed a few years earlier¹³⁵ that architectural sculpture elements in the north and south doors, which were indisputably datable to the fifth century, could indicate that the outside walls in which these doors are placed do not themselves date from this period, but, having deteriorated with time, were replaced with the brick walls which have given the building its familiar name “Red Monastery.” I also proposed that the doors included older carved elements that had perhaps formed part of the original portals.¹³⁶

Following my observations on site, I have now concluded that neither Grossmann’s opinion that the triconch was once free-standing, nor my own hypothesis that the present outer walls are not the original (ashlar?) structure, is valid. The fact that the masonry of the triconch is not integrated into the rear side wall allows an alternative interpretation. Grossmann wanted to explain this finding by a hypothesis of sequential development—in other words, by assuming two different construction phases. A different explanation seems to me to be more convincing, namely, a division not into periods but into allocations of responsibility: in other words, different sections of the building were allotted to different groups of workmen, who worked concurrently.

Not too much time can have elapsed between the work on the building shell and the work on the decorative elements in the triconch, as is clear—if we disregard for a moment the two-story attached column order—merely from the decorated niches contained in the walls of the conches (Figs. 6, 27) and the scallop-shaped keystones in the calottes of the three conches (Fig. 31). In any case, it would have been an obvious step for the decorator-stonemasons to use the scaffolding erected for the construction of the shell of the building. Besides, the broad central

133 Grossmann, *Architektur* (n. 1 above), 538.

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid., n. 489.

136 Severin, “Skulptur” (n. 3 above), 320.

section of the sanctuary façade is a structural component of the triconch. Its pilaster arrangement, its doors, and its niches, together with their decoration, must have been put up at the same time as the triconch; this is true—as the uniform decoration of the whole façade shows—also for the entire breadth of the sanctuary façade.

The notion that the triconch and sanctuary façade, with their decoration complete, stood for some unknown period of time without any other building around them must also be modified. Further components, such as the three capitals of the east colonnade CC 31–33 (Figs. 13–16), and the capital now lying in the former naos CC 34 (Fig. 17)—not assignable to the original structure with absolute certainty, but very similar with respect to dimensions and execution of the architectural decoration in the triconch and on the sanctuary façade—point rather to the colonnades of the naos having been erected by the same workmen who built the original structure. I thus propose a single major construction phase covering the building of the sanctuary and the colonnades of the naos. At the same time, of course, if only for technical structural reasons, at least the south wall of the naos and the west and north external walls of the church must also have been under construction.

Today's outer walls are—compared with the sanctuary of the church—of relatively inferior quality. This can be seen not only in the simple material (brick) but also in the construction technique. Some of the windows, e.g., in the north outer wall, have a strange shape that can hardly be explained by the desire for a particular form of illumination; rather, they must be the result of clumsy workmanship. Besides, the inside surface of the outer walls, unlike that in the church of the Shenute monastery (Fig. 49), is undecorated, and the niches are merely hollows in the wall (Fig. 50).¹³⁷

This finding can be interpreted in a number of ways.

According to the above thesis, although the brick walls could have been built to replace the original outer walls, this could not have happened at a very late date—for example in the high Middle Ages—because the structure of the present outer walls presupposes a large church in full function. Why, however, the outer walls should have needed replacement at a relatively early date,

while the sanctuary together with its west façade has remained largely intact to this day, cannot be explained; this improbability is a weak point of the thesis proposed above. In the church of the Shenute monastery the opposite situation has prevailed: the original outer walls are still largely intact, while the two attached column orders of the sanctuary collapsed at an early date.

Here, too, a more detailed examination produces a better explanation: the existing outer walls at Dayr Anbā Bīšūy are basically original. Their inferior quality compared with the ashlar façade of the sanctuary, with regard both to material and to construction technique, may be the result of a measure of economy. It is evident that less-well-trained workmen were employed on the construction of these outer walls: non-professionals, perhaps, and possibly monks. The striking contrast between the opulence of the architectural decoration in the sanctuary, including its façade, on the one hand (Figs. 3, 5–6) and the plainness of the inner surface of the naos on the other (Fig. 50)—especially in comparison with the Shenute monastery church, where the inner surfaces of the outer walls are decorated with numerous niches (Fig. 49)—was evidently thought a price worth paying when the decision was taken, on economic grounds, to subdivide the project into a number of allocations to different teams of workmen with different degrees of skill.

The construction seams observed by Grossmann in the sanctuary façade—above the doors in the side rooms of the triconch—could well be a result of a decision by the professional craftsmen who were working on the triconch and the sanctuary façade that they should suspend work until work on the outer walls had progressed sufficiently that the sanctuary façade could be connected in a final stage with the north and south walls of the naos.

According to these latest insights, it is interesting to notice that the highest degree of splendor was reserved for the sanctuary of the church—with allowance for the cost—while the outer walls were seen as an opportunity to save money. Here too we have a palpable contrast with the structure of the large church of the Shenute monastery, where the client was under no pressure to exercise fiscal restraint.

The date of the insertion in the outer walls of the two doors (Figs. 32, 35) made of late-antique building materials, at least some of which could have come from the original structure or were available in the immediate vicinity, remains an open question. The reason for this substantial alteration was probably the desire for two

¹³⁷ Several niches have a monolithic sill in the form of a cavetto, but are otherwise devoid of decoration. I was nowhere able to find any traces of decoration in the form of flanking half-columns or pilasters, or of calotte or barrel vault decorations, or of pediments.



Fig. 49 Dayr Anbā Šinūda, north outer wall, interior (1981, before restoration)

prestigious church entrances—it must have been a time of relative security. If the assumption should prove correct that at least the two pilaster capitals PC 26–27 at the south door, but possibly also the capitals PC 24–25 at the north door, derive from important portals of the original structure, the erection of the two doors in the outer walls would have taken place only after the destruction and abandonment of the large naos—in other words, after the reduction in the size of the church.

D. The Dating of the Church

Peter Grossmann, the best specialist in Early Christian church architecture in Egypt, thirty years ago dated Dayr Anbā Bišūy to the sixth century.¹³⁸ Since his subsequent discovery that as early as about the middle of the fifth

century the church of the Shenute monastery (Dayr Anbā Šinūda) possessed a pair of central columns between the east corners of the north and south colonnades,¹³⁹ and that, as a result of that finding, the two buildings no longer seemed to be separated by a large time gap, a date in the late fifth century for Dayr Anbā Bišūy became prevalent in the scholarship, and the few published examples of the architectural decoration would seem to corroborate this chronology.¹⁴⁰

Now, however, the possibility of examining the architectural decoration of Dayr Anbā Bišūy in more detail has given rise to some new insights, which in my opinion clearly point to a later date. According to a generally accepted rule, dating is based on the most recent elements of an ensemble. We now recognize at least three pilaster capitals on the sanctuary façade (PC 2–3,

138 For example P. Grossmann, “Frühchristliche Baukunst in Ägypten,” in *Spätantike und frühes Christentum*, ed. B. Brenk (Berlin, 1977), 242–43, no. 272.

139 P. Grossmann, “New Observations in the Church and Sanctuary of Dayr Anbā Šinūda—the so-called White Monastery—at Sühāg: Results of Two Surveys in October, 1981 and January, 1982,” *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l’Égypte* 70 (1984–85): 69–73, esp. 70–71.

140 Cf. note 11.



Fig. 50 Dayr Anbā Bīšūy, north outer wall, interior (1981)

PC 14: Figs. 19–20, 24–25) in which the lower section of the acanthus leaf has been replaced by a trefoil growing out of two tendrils. This formation, hitherto unnoticed in Dayr Anbā Bīšūy,¹⁴¹ broke definitively with the structure of the traditional acanthus leaf. Likewise the use of different foliage designs within one capital (PC 2–3, also PC 24–25 and PC 26–27) and the occurrence of “leaf branches” (PC 2–3, also PC 26–27), which can be linked to comparable examples datable indisputably to the sixth century (Figs. 41–45), suggest a dating for Dayr Anbā Bīšūy in the middle third of the sixth century, and at the very earliest, the second quarter.¹⁴² If this is true, then Dayr Anbā Bīšūy was built several generations, almost

or about a century, after the large Shenute monastery church.¹⁴³

We see here too the unique value of the state of preservation of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy. If we did not have the ensemble in its preserved state, but, as in other archaeological sites in Egypt, had to argue solely on the basis of individual fragments, we would come to different

¹⁴¹ In Monneret de Villard, *Couvents* (n. 1 above), there are no detailed illustrations of pilaster capitals. Pensabene, *Elementi* (n. 11 above), 441–42, no. 573, pl. 67 illustrates only one example of a pilaster capital (= here PC 10), which shows “normal” acanthus leaves and thus is not very helpful for the dating.

¹⁴² A dating to the 6th century (without detailed argumentation) is to be found, for example, in R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4th rev. ed. (New Haven–London, 1986), 117.

¹⁴³ This demolishes one alleged fixed point for the dating of limestone architectural sculpture in Egypt in the late fifth century, producing consequences not only for the chronology of capitals but also for that of niche heads. The parabolic contour of the inner fields of the niche arches G 1–4, situated in the side conches above the entrances to the west and east passages, has now proved to be later than hitherto assumed (cf. for example Severin, “Dekor,” 81; Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:129 [both n. 11 above]). For the dating of the niche heads of al-Bahnasā/Oxyrhynchos no correction is necessary, however, for Krumeich had already used additional detailed analyses to provide a reasoned argument for a putative dating of the relevant pieces “at the end of the 5th century into the first half of the 6th” (Krumeich, *Bauskulptur*, 1:129; 2:151–52 [N9–N11], pls. 115–16; 2:154–55 [N 15], pl. 118). In view of the material presented here, I am unable to share the concern of Török, “Heap,” 73–98, esp. 92–93, that my datings to the 5th and 6th centuries, as presented in earlier publications, are too late.

conclusions about the dates of different groups of decorative elements in Dayr Anbā Bīšūy—late fifth century, and second third of the sixth century. Three pilaster capitals (Figs. 19–20, 25) in situ evince the most modern formulations in the architectural decoration of the church; they show at the same time that the contemporarily sculpted column capitals and other pilaster capitals, which had hitherto defined the dating, simply represent a retrospective style.¹⁴⁴ This should serve as a caution not to place

too much faith in the reliability of dating architectural decoration without its architectural context.

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¹⁴⁴ This probably was the result of an attempt to copy the architecture and architectural decoration of the famous large church of Shenute.